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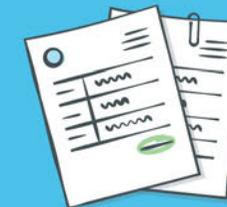


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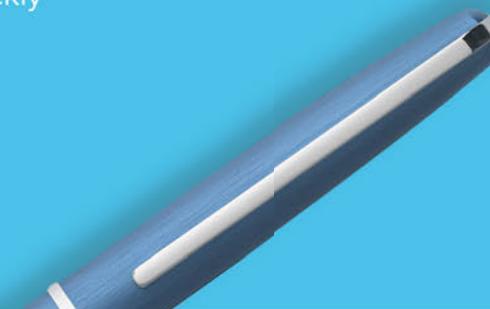


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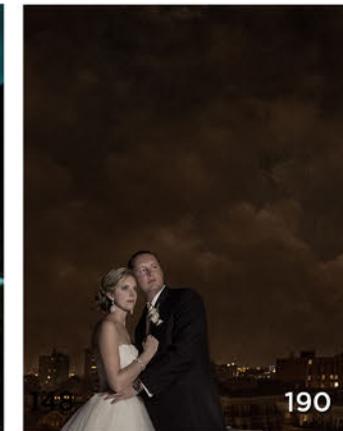
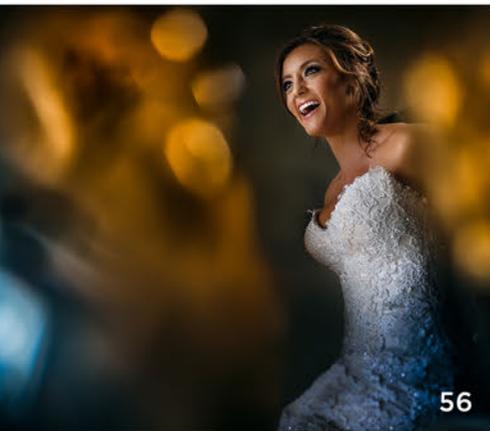
Sal Cincotta



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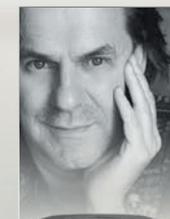
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Shutter Magazine is about photography education. Our goal is to provide current, insightful, and in-depth educational content for today's professional wedding and portrait photographer. Shutter Magazine uses the latest technologies to deliver information in a way that is relevant to our audience. Our experienced contributors help us create a sense of community and establish the magazine as one of the leading photography publications in the world.

Shutter Magazine: By photographers, for photographers.

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THE COVER

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MAKEUP ARTIST: Aurora Lord

ABOUT THE IMAGE: This image was taken at our studio in O'Fallon, Illinois. Follow more behind the scenes in Sal's article this month!



LAUNCH POINT

— A MESSAGE —
FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
SAL CINCOTTA

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BUILDING A
STRONG NETWORK



The Next Big Building Block: An Effective Network

by Skip Cohen

This year in each issue of *Shutter Magazine*, we're focusing on a building block for your business. Your site and blog, together with your skill set, make up the foundation of what can become a thriving business. Now it's time to head into marketing, starting with building a great network.

Right now I'm betting a few of you are rolling your eyes, dying to tell me that networking isn't really marketing. Of course it is. What good is working to create the greatest images of your life if nobody knows who you are? Even more important, when you've got a challenge that's beyond your skill set, who are you going to call to help find a solution? While marketing and self-promotion are a big part of the effort, it all starts with a strong network.

Defining Your Network

Let's start with defining a good network. It's more than pockets of business cards you've collected while shaking hands at conventions and workshops. A really effective network is about people you know, and, more importantly, people who know you.

I like to think of a network like a target, with you being the bull's-eye. In the first circle out, you've got those people you're closest to. Often they're best friends, family members, associates you regularly work with, along with employees or business partners. Those in the next circle out are slightly more removed; this group would be people who have a strong, direct impact on your business. These are people you'd feel comfortable calling in a crisis, be it serious or just a short-term challenge you need help with.

The next circle is all the vendors you work with. For every product or service involved in your business, you should have one person at each company whom you know and have met, either through a phone call or preferably in person at a trade show or convention. This is an incredibly helpful group, because they talk to other photographers all over the country.

Think about what would make a rep at your lab so important. Right off the bat, she talks to hundreds of photographers every week. She's not only an expert on her company's products and services, she's also like the town crier. She knows what's going on and is part of the grapevine. She may have just talked with a photographer in one part of the country who's experiencing the same challenge you are in another.

The last circle is your broadest, and is equally important. It's the biggest because it represents your target audience. Your reach to them is going to be a combination of actually getting to know them, as well as getting them to know you through publicity, self-promotion and community involvement.

Your database is part of your network. And, while everybody is always worried about finding new customers, just about everybody forgets about past clients. Even with past bridal clients, the younger they were when you photographed their wedding, the more friends they have who will someday be getting married. Being in your network doesn't mean they're just a placeholder for a position, but a key client to maintain a relationship with. It can be as easy as sending a card on their anniversary, or calling or emailing just to check in with them.

Local Associations, Camera Clubs, Camera Guilds and Online Forums

While ideally it starts with actually meeting somebody, you've got to make the effort. This is where it becomes so important to get involved in the local guild, camera club or professional association in your community. The people you're going to meet all share the same passion in building a business, as well as the same frustrations. You'll be amazed how much you'll learn just by talking to your competitors.

Forums and online groups are another terrific resource. Let's use the ShutterFest forum on Facebook as a prime example. Every day there are questions from photographers needing help, and almost instantly, somebody will answer. It's a community with a never-ending passion for helping one another.

Own Your Zip Code

I first heard the expression from my good buddy Scott Bourne, and it's so important to the growth of your brand and business.

Think about one circle in your network being made up of all the businesses within a 10-mile radius of your location. The key is meeting every one of them. This is all about pounding the pavement and introducing yourself to each one and leaving your business card or brochure.

What so many of you don't get is the thought process. You're stuck thinking that because your specialty is wedding or children's portraiture, you have nothing in common with the manager of the local Re/Max office. Well, who do you think is getting married or making those babies who are going to be part of a family portrait down the line?

Plus, this is your chance to introduce yourself:

"My specialty is wedding photography, but I love everything about imaging. If you ever need help with anything, give me a call. I might not always have the answer for you, but I have an amazing network of photographers and manufacturers in the photo industry."

All you have to do is offer to be helpful.

Community Business Groups

Get yourself into any one of the service groups in your community. That means Kiwanis, Rotary, Exchange Club, the Chamber of Commerce and dozens of others. This is about the community getting to know you as well as you getting to know them.

Networking Luncheons

There's no reason for you not to establish your own networking luncheon. Let's use a wedding photographer as an example, simply because it's so easy to understand the other vendors.

Find a small restaurant with a private room and an inexpensive menu. Nothing fancy, just a good private room. We're not out to set a culinary standard, just to have lunch and talk business.

Now, invite every vendor in the community that has anything to do with weddings. Everybody pays for their own lunch, and you can work it out in advance with the restaurant so paying the bill goes smoothly. Whom you invite is up to you, but think about the power around the table if suddenly you got to know a bakery or two, travel agent, bridal salon, wedding planner, florist, spa, salon, tux shop, music promoter, limo service, etc. And don't forget venues and caterers. Over time, you might even get a venue or caterer to provide lunch.

The agenda is simple. Introduce yourself and thank them for coming. Next, go around the room and let everybody introduce themselves and their products/services. Then, just state your purpose: By all of you getting to know each other, there might be opportunities to work together, or maybe to share the cost of direct mail campaigns or sponsorship of something in the community.

All of you have the same target audience: bridal clients. Getting to know each other and building relationships is key to you building your brand.

Community Involvement

Being involved in charitable work in your community is a great way to build your reputation. It's another part of your network, working with people who share a passion for a cause or project. Again, it's about getting your name out there. The fun is that it's just about being involved, and may not require your skills as a photographer at all. Be generous with your time and build a reputation as somebody who gives back to the community. The point is that you're looking for your community to be good to you, so you've got to be good to your community.

Keeping in Touch: The Care and Feeding of Your Network

A great network entails regular interaction between you and the people in it. That means you've got to stay in touch. It might be with a phone call now and then, an email or a blog post. Even better, it might be grabbing lunch with a key network member.

I've referred to myself jokingly over the years as the "biggest lunch slut" in photography. In all honesty, I really am. I love having lunch with anybody who has anything to do with imaging. There are few better ways to get to know somebody than a great conversation over lunch.

When I first moved back to Ohio in 2009, I knew virtually nobody in photography. On Facebook, I had gotten to know a photographer named Brian Palmer before moving there. Within a month of moving to Akron, I called Brian and we grabbed lunch. He and his family have since become great friends. While he might be living in Japan at the moment, nothing changes the friendship that grew out of that first lunch, and in turn the help he gave me over the years when we needed an image or two for a book project or magazine article.

Having a great network isn't about collecting names and business cards. It's about building relationships. You can't just meet somebody and then walk away until you need some help down the road. If you keep in touch and build relationships, when you need help the most, you won't have to call anybody. They'll already be there for you. ■



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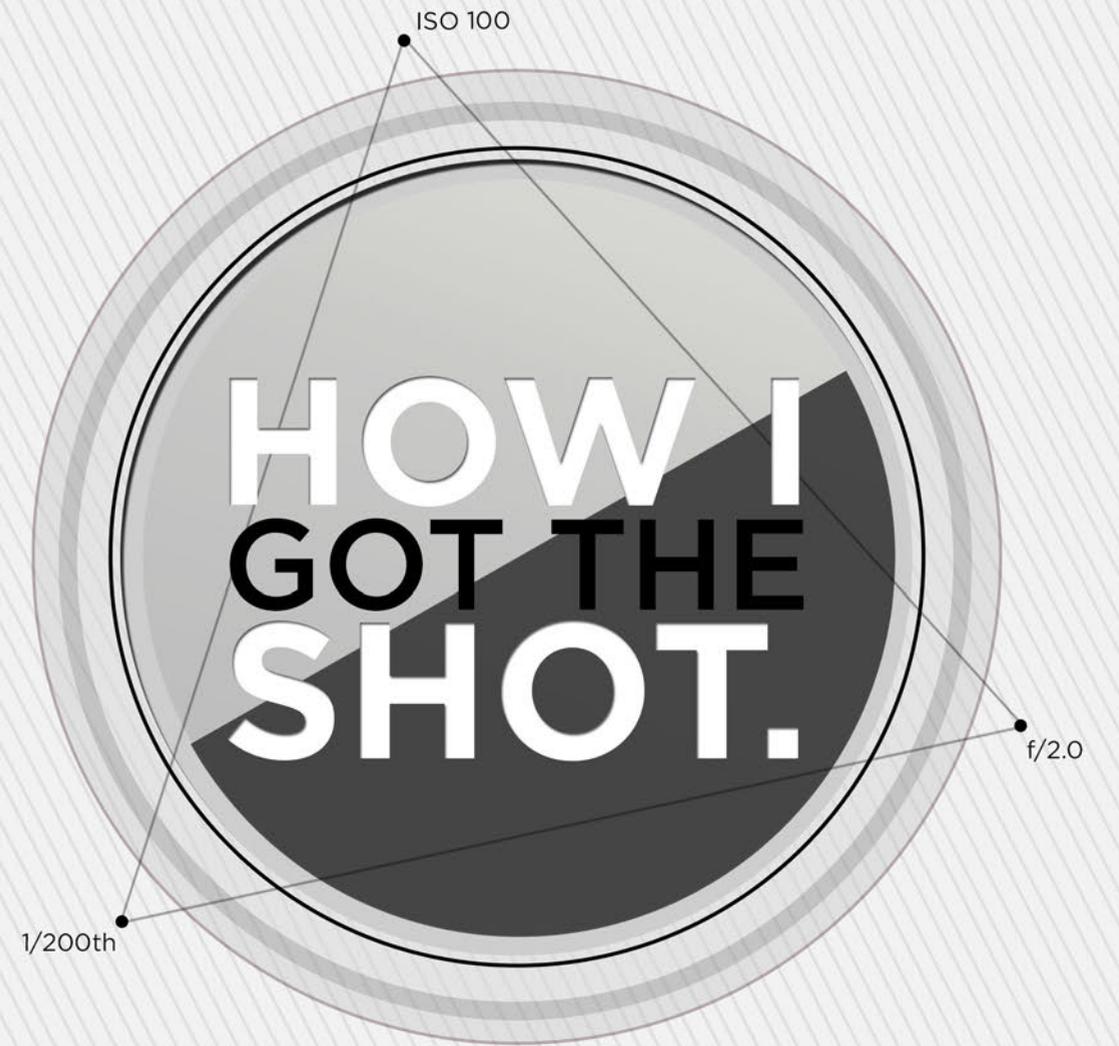
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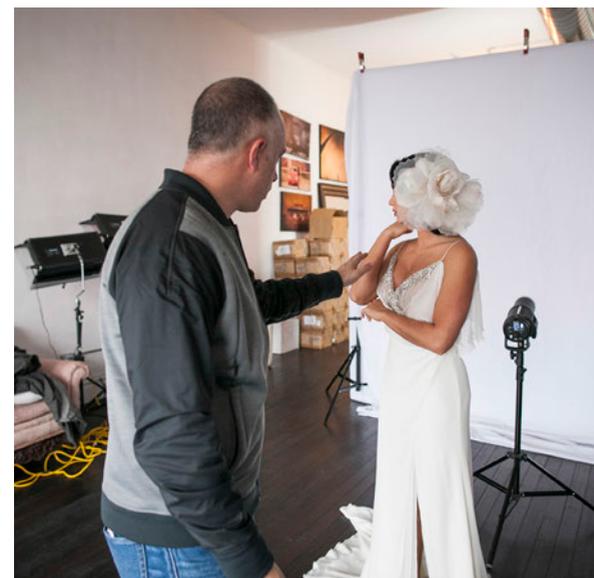
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CONCEPT

I am constantly challenging myself to stand out from the crowd. So when I heard about the new Velvet 56, I wanted to challenge myself to shoot with it in studio to create an atypical bridal portrait, but something I am not known for at all: a high-key bridal portrait.

LOCATION

This was shot in my studio, but could easily be replicated in any hotel room. In fact, that's the beauty of this lens. It really just adds a softness to the subject and the edge detail to create an extremely unique image. All too often, we are shooting brides in their hotel rooms, and those rooms are horrible most of the time: outdated, bad light, junk all over the room, etc. We have to make these locations look better than they do to the naked eye.

MAKEUP

The talented Aurora Lord was with us on this shoot. The goal was a pale look to match the high-key nature of the shot. We also wanted a matte-finish lip. Too glossy, and the shot just has a different look and feel. On a shot like this, get the makeup wrong, and it can ruin the entire shoot. So it's important, as always, to work closely with your makeup artist.

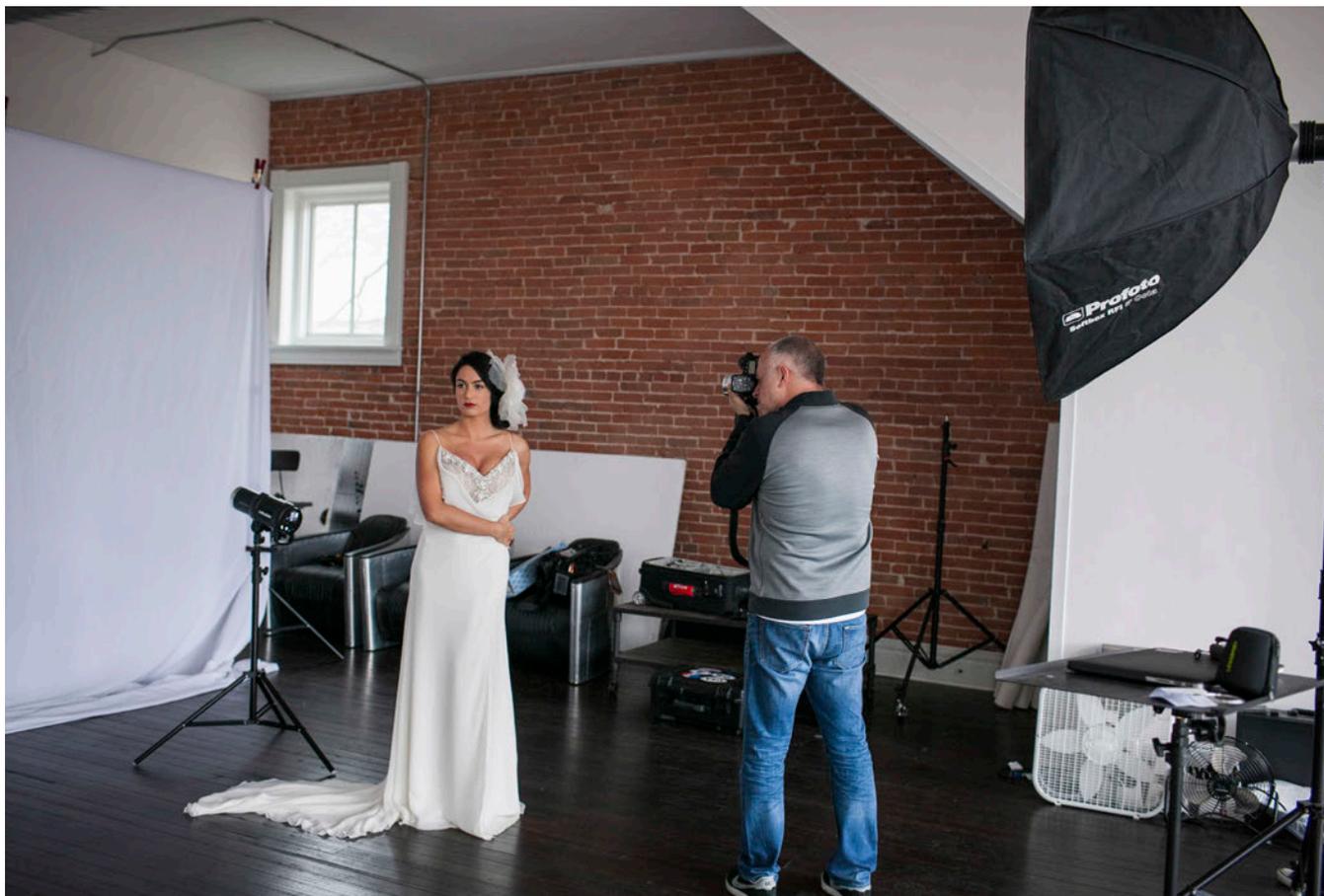
by **Sal Cincotta**



It's wedding month here at *Shutter Magazine*, and I am pumped. Why am I pumped? Well, first and foremost, I love shooting weddings. It truly is my passion. Photographing weddings is really one of the most incredible jobs in the world because clients are trusting us with one of the most important days of their lives. But this month, I am pumped because I got to be one of the first to play with the new lens from Lensbaby, the Velvet 56.

Here is the reality. In the world of wedding photography, everyone is a photographer. Everyone has a friend or a cousin who just thinks she can do it as a hobby. That's fine, but the problem for us is that age-old question: How will you stand out from the crowd? Clients will continue to wonder why they should pay you more. What is your answer? Just because you are better? Well, that's not going to work. Instead, we have to continuously look for ways to stand out from the crowd.

The Velvet 56 offers one of those ways.



|| LIGHTING

The beauty of shooting in your studio is that you have complete control over the light. Again, this is something that can be replicated inside a hotel room. Trust me when I tell you, this will be something I do for my brides this year. This is not a normal shot for me, and I know my brides are going to go nuts for something like this.

To light this shot, we used the Profoto D1 with an Octabox for the main light. To light up the white backdrop, we used the Profoto B1 with no modifier.

|| GEAR

Camera // Canon 1DX

Lens // Lensbaby Velvet 56

Settings // 1/200th @ f2.0, ISO100

Lights // Profoto B1 and D1

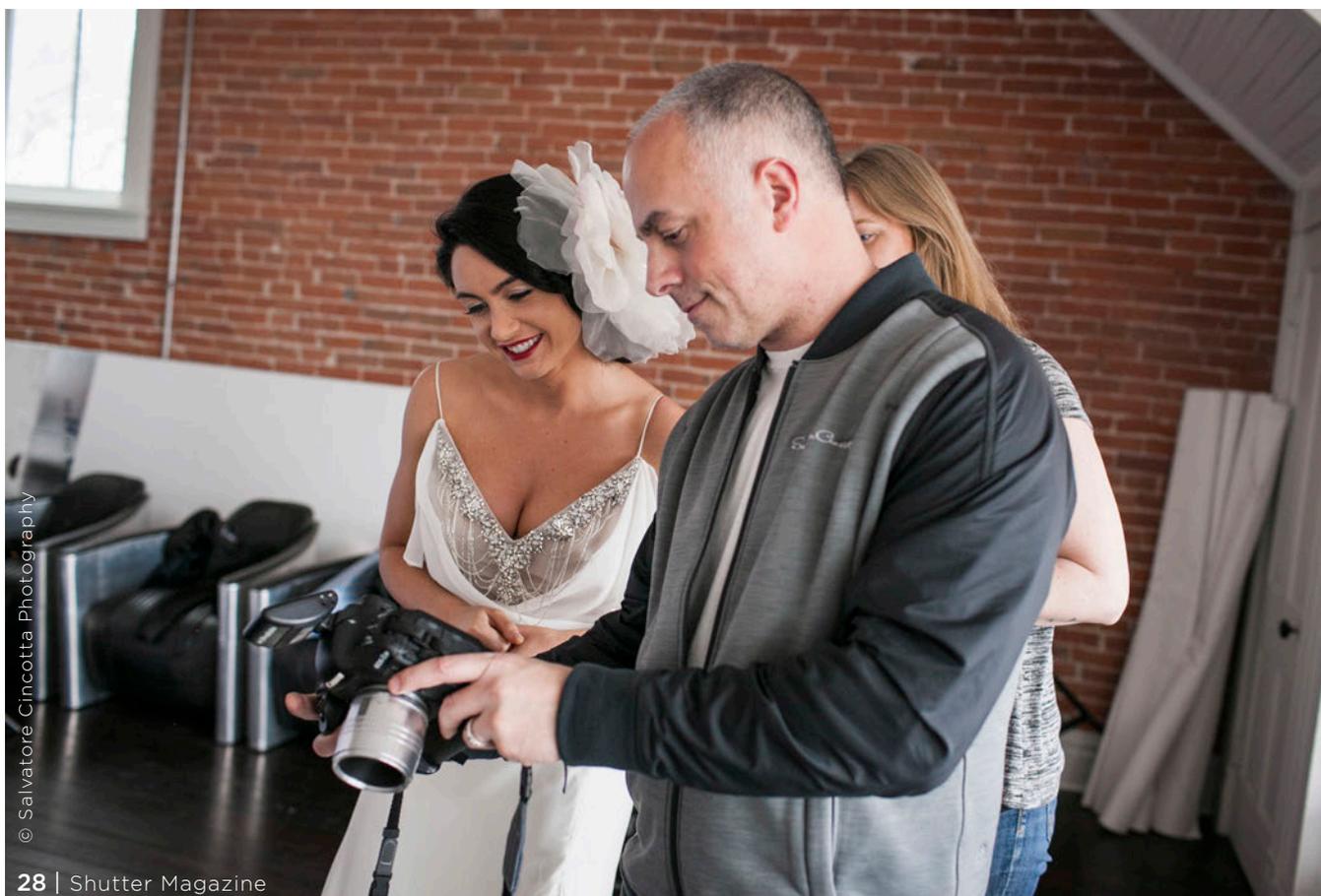
Modifiers // Profoto Octabox

|| CLOSING

What will you do this year to stand out from the crowd? Every day, every week, every month, you should be challenging yourself to do something different. Get uncomfortable. Stop being so predictable. Your brides will go nuts and will be willing to spend more money on a photographer who presents himself as an artist versus one whose work is just like everyone else's. ■

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THE PATH TO A

Successful Business

with Leonardo Volturo





by **Leonardo Volturo**

How many things are standing in the way of your having a successful business? For my wife and me, it came down to five key points. A couple of them are a little intimidating. For us, and I know a lot of you, one of them is straight-up scary.

I've spoken to many of you who are terrified to do what we did: raise prices, invest in new, higher-end products, move to in-person sales and kill those dirty digital negatives. Maybe some of you have family telling you that you can't charge that much or that you have to give everyone the digital negatives. Like many of you, we made mistakes we didn't have to make based on bad advice and fear. So take a deep breath, and let's talk about what we changed, what those changes did for our business and where we are today.

The Brand

Think about your appearance. Perception is reality. What are your potential clients seeing when they reach your website? What does your logo say about you? Think about some popular luxury brands. Are they timeless, classic, edgy, simple, extremely detailed? Does the logo match the company and its products? Is it cohesive? Now look at your logo. Is it professionally designed? Does it communicate your message?

Finding a great designer is key. We knew what we wanted to communicate to our clients with our logo, website and branding of our products and marketing materials. Our goal was to quickly begin to position ourselves as a luxury brand.

That meant investing in a custom logo from the start, followed by a custom WordPress site that would rank well with Google. For many of us, our website is the first point of contact potential clients will have with our businesses. If your logo doesn't stand out, the message that's broadcast is unpolished. The name of your business is equally important. We went with my name to both establish myself as the face of the business and to promote a connection with Italian luxury. What does your business name say about you?

So you've got your logo, website and business name. It's all cohesive and attractive, and communicates who you are. Now what about the images you are showing? Are they consistent with who you are, what you do and the type of clients you hope to attract?

We create big, dramatic images, and want clients who appreciate and can afford that kind of art in their homes. So that's what we show on our website. There are no ring shots in our portfolio, flower girls coming down the aisle or anything else that might distract from that message. We reserve those images for blog posts. We want the first thing our clients see to be images with impact. The last thing you want to do is confuse potential clients with images that mix styles and elements that don't work well together. You want to appear focused and specialized, not all over the map.

Having a consistent connection between your branding, website and imagery is essential. This will probably be one of your biggest marketing expenses, but it's also one of the most important investments you can make. Remember, there are no second chances for a first impression.



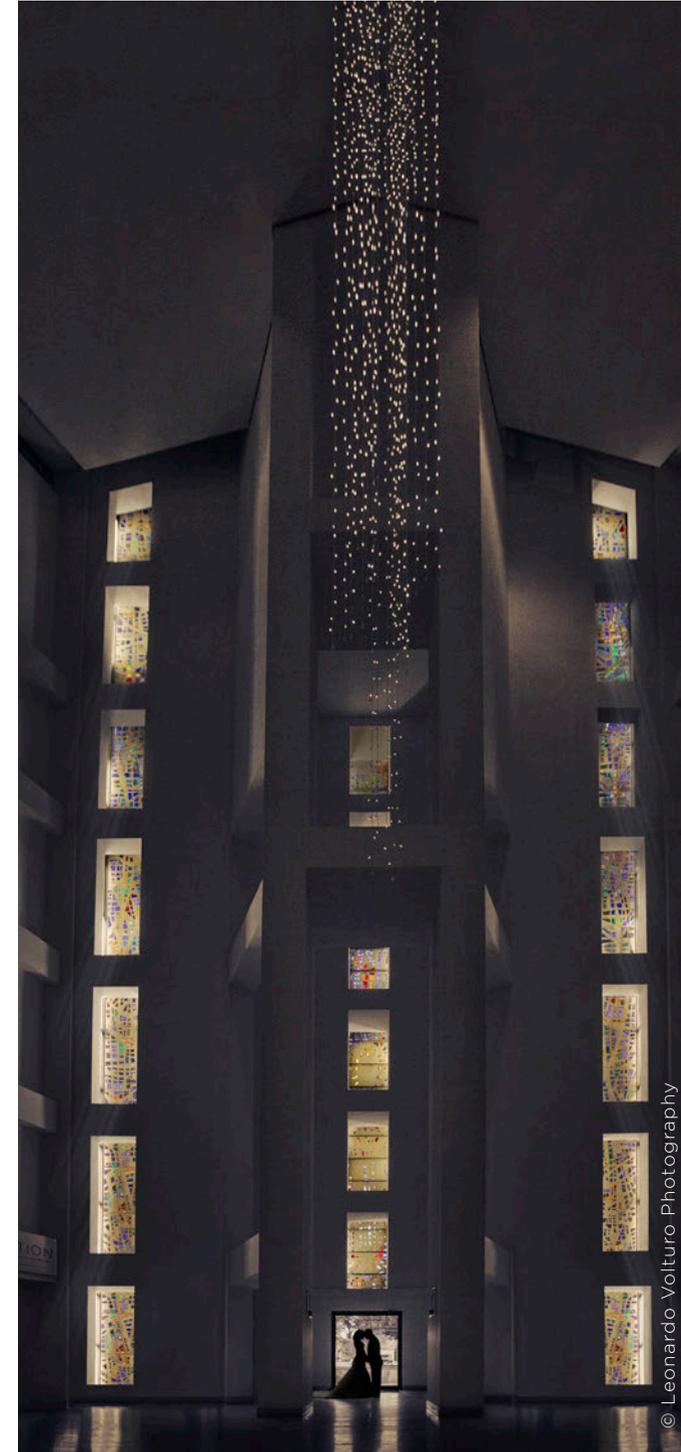


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IPS

Next up, let's talk about in-person sales, or IPS. Are you doing it? Do you know what it is? Instead of simply handing over image files from sessions, we bring our clients into the studio for in-person sales meetings. This gives us an opportunity to present our clients with their images for the first time in a controlled environment without distractions like ringing phones, screaming kids, must-see TV shows, etc. Equally important, we're also in control of the viewing experience, assuring the highest-quality presentation. During meetings, clients are able to place orders for prints, wall portraits, albums and other products at discounted bundled pricing that expires at the end of the meeting.

Starting out, we weren't offering in-person sales, and were actually including prints in our wedding collections. Our engagement sessions were à la carte versus being included in wedding collections. When clients did add on an engagement session, they were simply given the digital negatives and that was as far as it went. We were leaving thousands of dollars on the table. When we decided to switch to IPS, we added engagement sessions to all of our wedding collections, with the understanding that engagement sessions included only our time.



© Leonardo Volturo Photography

Advantages

By bringing clients into our studio to view their images for the first time rather than just handing over a CD, we accomplished three important things:

1. We gained the advantage of an emotionally charged and captive audience, with home-court advantage and no distractions.
2. We created an experience in which clients got a high level of personable customer service, enabling us to guide sales of prints, wall portraits, albums and other products.
3. We were able to lay the groundwork and set expectations for the sales process that clients came to expect.

With engagements, we quickly jumped from zero dollars to our current average of over \$1K per engagement sale. Post-wedding in-person sales may be a little more difficult, with clients already receiving digital negatives and an album, but that's where prints, wall portraits, social media options and album upgrades come in. By having high-quality products that stand out from the crowd, you're halfway there. This is why even after the wedding, we are still averaging over \$1K in post-sales.

I know what you're thinking: I don't have an office, studio or other place to do IPS. You don't need a huge space, a 70-inch TV and theater seating. All you need is a comfortable, inviting space where you can show clients their images and walk them through your offerings. Once you do this, you will start making those sales. This can easily be done in your home or a virtual office. Just find a place, and the dollars will find you. Don't leave thousands in revenue on the table.



© Leonardo Volturo Photography



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Products

If you want to command higher prices, and also excel at IPS and position yourself as a high-end brand, then, like other high-end brands, you need to offer superior-quality products and service. This requires a substantial investment of time and money; you'll need to do your research. The biggest priority for us was finding a line of albums that would stand out from what everyone else in our market was offering. While everyone was busy using "the other guys," we did our homework and found significantly higher-quality albums available in impressive sizes and with plenty of options. This allows our clients numerous ways to customize their albums, provides another level of distinction for our business and helps our bottom line with additional revenue.

Our wedding business philosophy is based around the eventual production and sale of an album. It's not only the best way to tell our clients' stories, but it also represents a significant portion of our studio income.

This being the case, our albums needed to be the best. Trade shows are a great resource when you're trying to decide which products are the best fit for your studio. I highly recommend attending at least one conference a year to keep up with new products and trends.

Albums are only one piece of the puzzle; equally important for us are print sales. We decided to go beyond the typical wall portraits and canvases, and invested in large acrylic and metal prints. We display these prominently in our sales meeting room. Remember, you only sell what you show. Providing clients with high-end products and options that aren't available elsewhere has pushed our clients into our higher-dollar-value/higher-profit-margin packages. Acrylics and metals are the most common options our clients purchase for their wall art. These are just a couple of the products we offer that help us stand out from the crowd. There are a whole host of options out there worth investigating. The time and money are well spent. It's one of the best ways to differentiate yourself in your market.

Digital Negatives

Digital negatives are a hot-button issue for wedding photographers and clients, with strong opinions on both sides of the "include them, don't include them" argument. For a while, we offered them in our base package as well as our mid- and top-tier offerings. Guess what happened? The lion's share of our bookings was our base package. Shocker. We went back and forth constantly trying to decide whether to continue including digital negatives in our base package or get rid of them entirely. We feared that if we didn't offer them, no one would book us and we'd lose all our business.

Eventually, the number of base packages we were booking was having an impact on our bottom line, which motivated us to make the switch and stop offering digital negatives with our base package. Kind of a no-brainer: If you don't want the majority of clients signing for your base package, then it needs to be significantly less attractive than your other offerings. Bye-bye, digital negatives. Removing the digital negatives had exactly the opposite effect we were expecting. Nobody seemed to care. If clients wanted files,

they chose a collection that included them. For those price-sensitive clients booking our base collection (only two so far), in-person engagement and wedding post-sales meetings offered an opportunity for additional purchases, including digital negatives.

Here's the thing. If someone doesn't book with us because digital negatives aren't included in the base collection, all they care about is digital negatives. More than likely, they'll be a minimally spending client. That's not the client we're after.

To give you some hard numbers, let's look at the first meeting we had after removing digital negatives from our base collection, in 2013. A couple booked our middle collection on the spot, and then went on to purchase our top engagement and top wedding post-session collections. You decide: fluke or smart business? Since that meeting, only two clients have gone with our base wedding package. Through IPS, the first client purchased a post-wedding collection and upgraded the album, and the second purchased our top post-wedding collection and added the digital negatives as well.



Raising Your Prices

I know this is going to be an intimidating step for many of you. The biggest concern is losing business as a result. Don't freak out. You're not going to lose business. What will more realistically cause you to lose business is operating at unsustainably low price points. Your old clients probably won't be able to afford you, and that's OK, because you're going to seek out new clients. You can't make all these changes and simply expect new, more affluent clients to just show up. After making all these positive changes, you need to get in front of clients who are in line with your new business model.

Raising prices was the final step in our process, and it happened only once all the other components were in place. Testing collections and pricing in our market, and then increasing our booking rate accordingly, gave us the confidence we needed to raise prices. Our goal was to find a price point that worked in our market and worked for us, and that gave us a solid footing for the future.

Tying It All Together

To sum it all up, here's how we did it:

1. We got our branding and public image in line with our goals.
2. We switched to in-person sales, bringing together the right products and a comfortable, well-appointed meeting environment that encouraged sales and boosted profits.
3. We removed digital negatives from our base package and raised prices, while adding value to all our collections.

Together, these changes have enabled us to go from an average of \$3K to \$8K per wedding. All these changes take work and money—and maybe a leap of faith, for some—but it's well worth the effort. Take it step by step, and don't feel like you have to tackle every change at once. Work slowly and deliberately, do your research and test as you go. I'm betting you're going to be very pleased with the results. ■



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From the Readers

© Salvatore Cincotta Photography





Five Ways to
— **Date** —
Your Clients
with Vanessa Joy



© Vanessa Joy



© Vanessa Joy

by **Vanessa Joy**

Wedding photographers are the most unique vendors at a wedding. We're the ones who are at the event the longest, from getting ready all the way through to the end of the night. If we do an engagement or bridal session, we're the only vendor to work with the couple before the big day. And to top it off, we're one of the first vendors to get booked and one of the last that they work with after the wedding. Ultimately, we spend the most time with the bride and groom over any other vendor before, during and after the wedding. Think about that. Your clients book you 12 to 18 months before the wedding and then get their wedding album within six to 12 months after the wedding. That means you're in contact with them for roughly two years. When I first meet with my clients, I tell them that we practically date for two years, so it's really important not only that they like my photos, but that they "enJoy" me as well (pun entirely intended).

So how can we make sure that our dating relationship with our clients is one full of excitement and butterflies, just like you'd want a real romantic relationship to be? What can we do to make sure the flame doesn't burn out and you're all left with that bitter end-of-relationship feeling where both of you just can't wait to get out of it? I think we can apply basic dating principles here to figure out how we can date our clients so that they'll be dancing on Cloud Nine and tell all their friends about their wonderful experience with you.



1 - Surprise Them

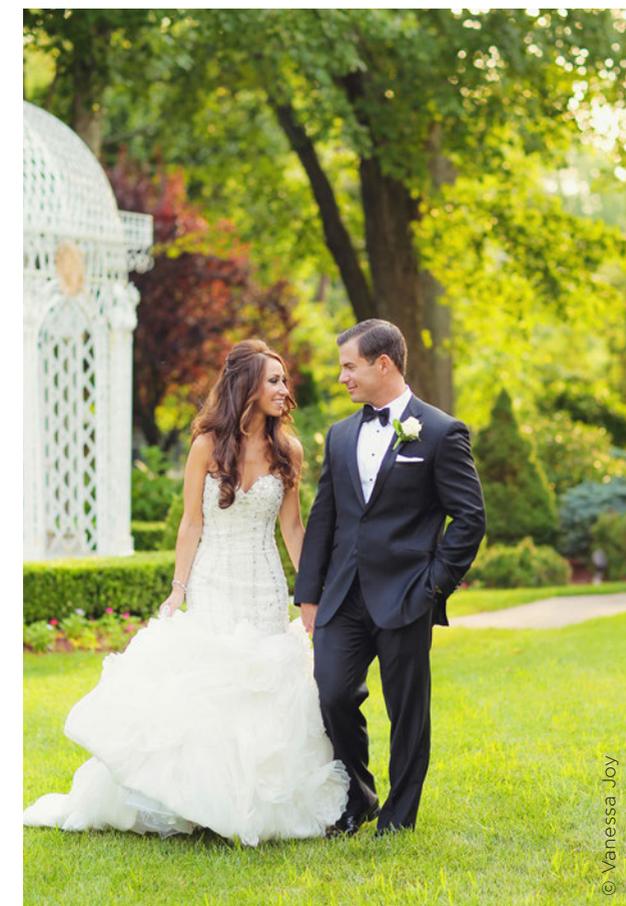
No one likes being in a complacent comfort-zone relationship. Kill the possibility of a stale relationship, and surprise them a time or two. For me, this is where client gifts come into play.

I love speaking my love language to my clients (more on that later)—and that means gifting. To me, a gift says, “Here’s something to let you know I’ve been thinking about you when you’re not around.” Heartfelt and meaningful gifts are just a plus, but it’s the thought behind the gift that gets me. That’s why moms love when their little girls pick them a handful of weeds, and display them proudly as the most beautiful bouquet of flowers. It’s not the gift itself, it’s the thought behind it. These little knick-knacks let my clients know I’m thinking about them during those times we’re not communicating as often. Hopefully, whenever they see the gift, they’ll think of me, and it’ll keep me fresh in their minds the next time one of their friends gets engaged.

2 - Don’t Leave Them Hanging

Nothing bugs a girlfriend more than when she texts or calls her significant other just to hear static and no reply. Ever been on that side of the phone? It’s enough to drive you to worry, frustration and panic. “Does he love me anymore?!” she may start thinking. But what it’ll do in a client relationship is make them think, “Will they show up on my wedding day?!”

As I mentioned in the video, you’ll want to set appropriate client expectations for the methods and times they can contact you and expect to get a response. It’s OK to decide to not take calls after hours, and it’s OK to decide to answer texts and emails late at night too. I think all client emails should be answered within 24 hours, with the weekends being an exception, especially if you’re shooting a wedding. Whatever your ground rules are, be consistent and make sure your clients know those rules so they’re not left feeling out in the cold.





© Vanessa Joy

3 - Don't Be All Business

When there's nothing to talk about but one topic in a relationship, it gets pretty boring pretty fast. It'll lead any party in a relationship to think you've got nothing in common anymore, and get them to start looking outside the relationship fondly at what other couples have. In a business relationship, that could lead to an unsatisfied client.

It's great to talk about the main event, but there's more going on in your client's life than her wedding. Don't be afraid to congratulate her on a new job, ask how her family is or let her in on a somewhat personal thing or two going on in your life. Keep ground rules that you're comfortable with, of course, but open up a bit, even if it's just shooting the breeze for a few minutes before getting into the main topic of the meeting. It'll make you more relatable and let you see your clients in a new light, which can help you do a better job for them.

4 - Do More

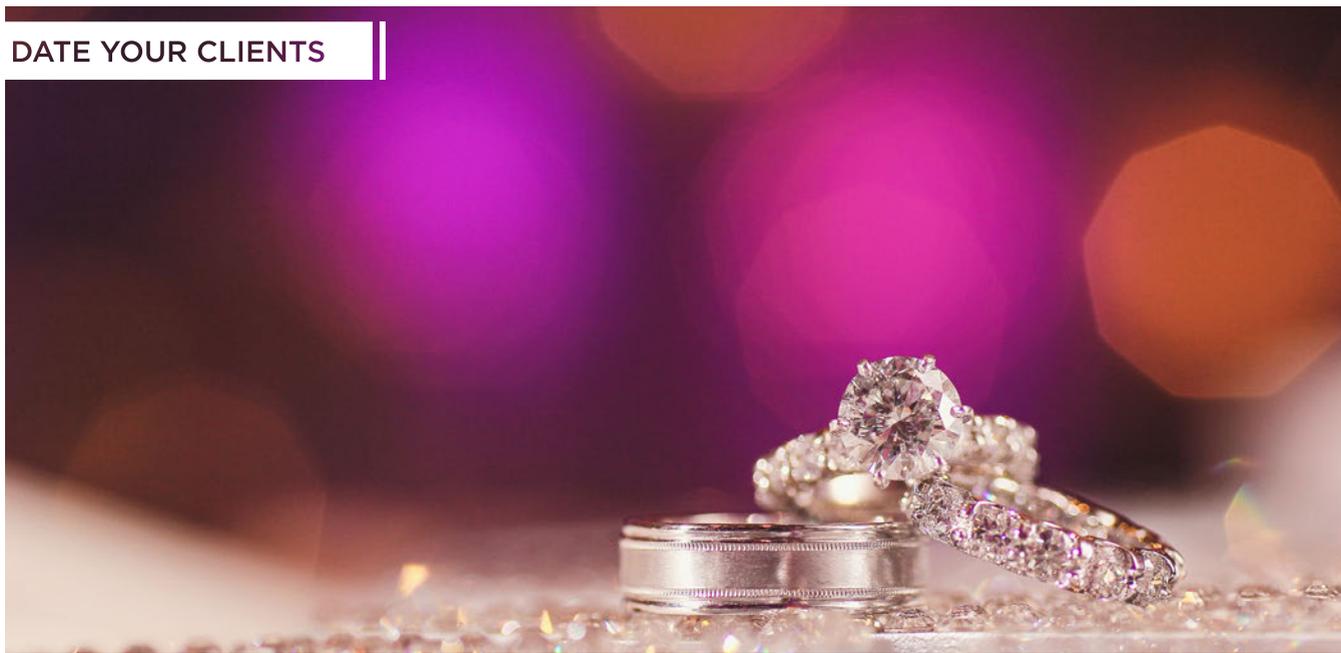
Ever have that boyfriend who would do the bare minimum when you asked for something? If you asked him to pick up ice cream on his way home and he came back with ice cream, great—you asked for that. But how much more fun would it be if he had come back with ice cream, cones and sprinkles?

Next time your client asks you for something, find a way to go above and beyond. Does your client need a file for her wedding website? Send her two. Does she want to collaborate on prop ideas for her engagement shoot? Create a Pinterest board with her that you can both add to. It doesn't have to be anything grand. The slightest bit of extra effort or innovation on your part will speak volumes.

“...find a way to go above and beyond for them.”



© Vanessa Joy



5 - Speak Their Love Language

This is one that I'm going to work on myself this year. If you're not familiar with "love languages," check out the book *The 5 Love Languages* by Gary D. Chapman. Although it was written for couples, it truly applies to any relationship.

So far, I think I've been pretty good at speaking my love language to clients (gifting, as I mentioned before), but what I'd like to start working on this year is learning to speak their love language with them. Maybe instead of gifts, they find words of affirmation more meaningful. Or perhaps acts of service speak straight to their heart more than anything else. I highly suggest taking the time to quickly learn the five love languages and find out which ones your clients relate to most so you can learn how to show you appreciate them in a language they understand. To implement this, I'm going to include a quick, fun quiz on my booking questionnaire that will tell me what love language they speak.



Sample Question From My "Love Language" Quiz:

Which would you prefer most from your significant other?

- 1 – Small surprise gift
- 2 – Cleaning the living room without asking
- 3 – Romantic night out
- 4 – Sweet love letter
- 5 – Foot rub

The answers to questions like this will tell me what love language a client wants to hear most. And that tells me what I can do for her throughout our time together (though I may have to pawn off the foot rub to a pedicurist).

Word-of-mouth marketing occurs with all your clients, either good or bad. Developing and maintaining positive client relationships is perhaps the biggest component of making sure that their word of mouth brings you new referrals. Take the time to nurture your wedding client relationships, and, by the time that relationship has come to an end, they'll be left with a positive sentiment attached to their wedding photos and to you. It'll be easy and natural for them to talk fondly about you every time they show friends and family their wedding photos, and that's exactly what you want. ■





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Turning the Ordinary
Into

EXTRAORDINARY

with Michael Anthony





by **Michael Anthony**

Wedding photography is extremely competitive. In addition to the challenges of excelling in a saturated field, wedding shooters often find themselves in situations where they seemingly possess little to no control of their surroundings. In order to excel in your business, you have to be able to provide your clients with creative consistency and a unique final product, no matter the situation. Fortunately, there are many tools that often go unused on a wedding day that can be found in our natural surroundings.

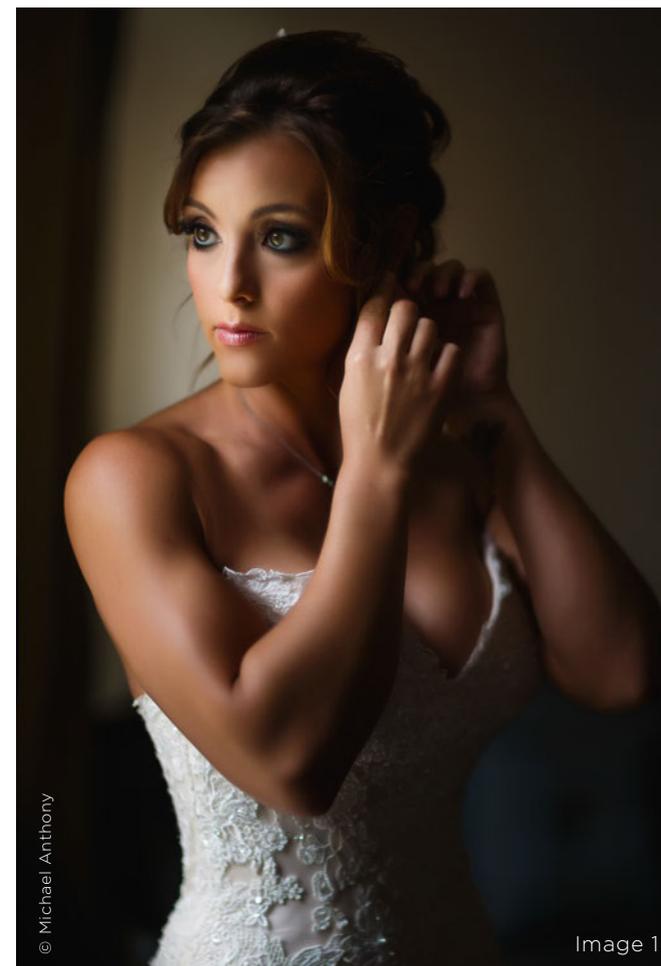
Get the Light Right

In order to overcome challenges when shooting bridal prep, you often have to think outside the box. When I walk into a bridal suite, the first thing I am looking at is the light. Often a bridal suite is full of clutter and people. When I arrive, I turn off all the ambient light in the room, and then begin to add light where I need it. I look for strong directional soft light with a darker background. This bridal suite (Images 1 & 2) had a huge window that allowed light to spill out in all directions. By closing the curtains and using them as a snoot, I was able to create the darker background and directional light I was looking for. This gave me a basis to shoot some of the prep scenes. Once your light is right, you can get creative.

Do not be afraid to use external lighting to complement the ambient light. The light in this room wasn't perfect (Images 3 & 4), so to create a gorgeous bridal shot, we used a large octabox and a Profoto B1 positioned close to our subject, with a reflector opposite to fill in the shadows. For a background, I found some furry pillows in an adjacent room and had our bride lie down on the bed. I then positioned the pillows around her and posed her in a way that showcased her curves. I stood above the model to give the photo an interesting angle. (When posing a model with her arms above her head, be careful to cover areas like the armpit, and always turn the face into the light.)

Tips for Getting the Light Right

- Turn off all of the ambient light in the room. Don't be afraid to ask for permission to do so. Add light back where you need it.
- Use curtains as natural light modifiers. You can create a snoot or use the backside as a reflector.
- Bring the proper tools for the job. Better to have something and not need it than to need something and not have it. You can purchase an affordable Yongnuo off-camera speedlight system if you are just starting with OCF. Use portable light modifiers to soften the light on your subject.



© Michael Anthony

Image 1



Image 3



Image 2



Image 4

Shooting Through Objects

One of my favorite techniques for removing a subject from a distracting room is to use a colored semitranslucent object to shoot through. During this shoot (Images 5 & 6), I found a soap dispenser and a toothbrush holder in a room next door. Using these two objects, I framed my subject and waited for the right moment to take the shot of her. A video light was held by the makeup artist to give the bride's hair some separation from the background. Remember, a great photograph is always going to be about light, composition and the moment. To nail all three elements takes patience, and it's always worth it.

When shooting through a translucent material (glass, water, leaves, etc.), using a bit of light on the backside of the object will cause its colors to pop, and will also sometimes cause a reflective pattern to appear. During the wedding day, there are many natural elements you can shoot through, but it's also a good idea to keep some in your camera bag just in case. Prisms, colored crystals and even flash gels are easy to carry with you.

Tips for Shooting Through Objects

- This technique can be applied anywhere on the wedding day. It often produces a candid effect. Make sure your pose is not camera-aware when shooting through something.
- By backlighting your shoot-through object, you will produce a very unique effect. We use this technique during receptions when using off-camera light by shooting through beer bottles/wine glasses.
- Carry a variety of objects with you in order to give your patterns some diversity.
- This technique blends really well with strong directional light, producing an inconsistent highlight-to-shadow pattern. Use off-camera flash to give your subject dramatic lighting.
- Veils make awesome shoot-through objects. Experiment with different veil techniques.



Image 5

“
A great photograph
is always going to be about
light, composition
and finally,
the moment.”

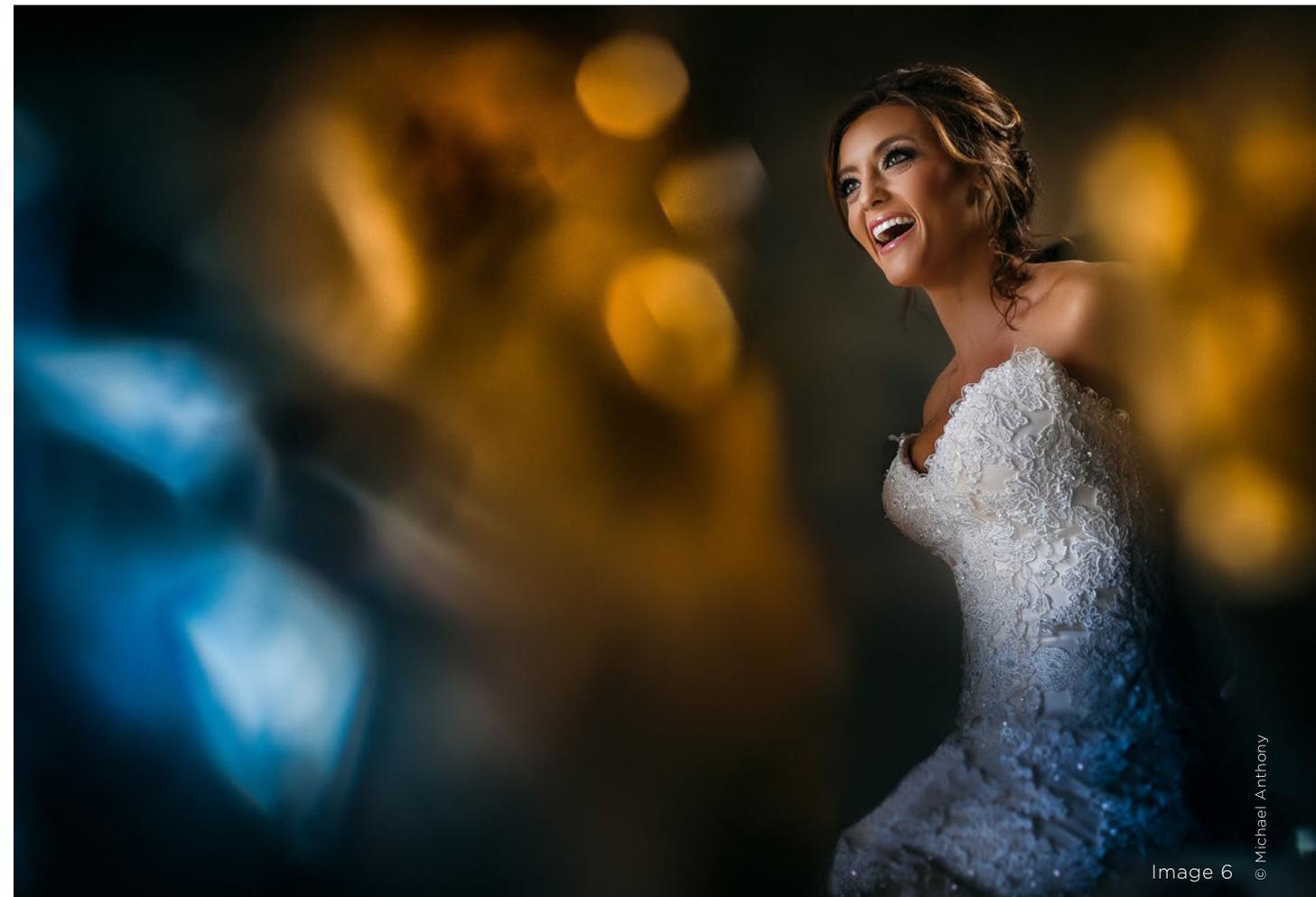


Image 6

© Michael Anthony



Image 7



Image 8

© Michael Anthony

Using Reflections

I admit I have an uncanny obsession with finding reflections on the wedding day. They add such an interesting dynamic to a photograph's composition, and always scream creativity to a client who has no idea what you are doing when you are framing a shot.

Reflections can be found in more than mirrors. Some of the best natural light comes from reflective surfaces that also produce light. When you are shooting on location, these scenes can be found on lit-up bus stops, movie posters, etc. But they can also be found in almost every bridal suite as well, namely through the television. The natural light in this room (Images 7 & 8) was incandescent and dark, but I noticed the TV hanging from the wall. I flipped it on and asked the bride to stand very close to the screen. I posed the bride close to the screen so the light source was large in relation to her body from the perspective of my shot. Through my lens, I was able to see the reflection. A solid color being displayed on the monitor would work best, but, as with most weddings, we rarely get control over such things. By taking multiple frames, you will find that eventually the light will be right. If done correctly, you will have beautiful light on your subject and a unique perspective that lends itself to your style.

Don't be afraid to use the natural light in your surroundings as well. This same room (Images 9, 10, 11 & 12) had almost no ambient light, except for two very large industrial-looking lamps. I positioned our bride very close to the lamps to soften the light as much as possible. By shooting at a wide aperture and a higher ISO (F/1.4, ISO 1250), I was able to suck up enough of the ambient light to create a good exposure. This shot required no additional lighting. Again, by using a reflection, I was able to create a dynamic portrait using the light available to me.

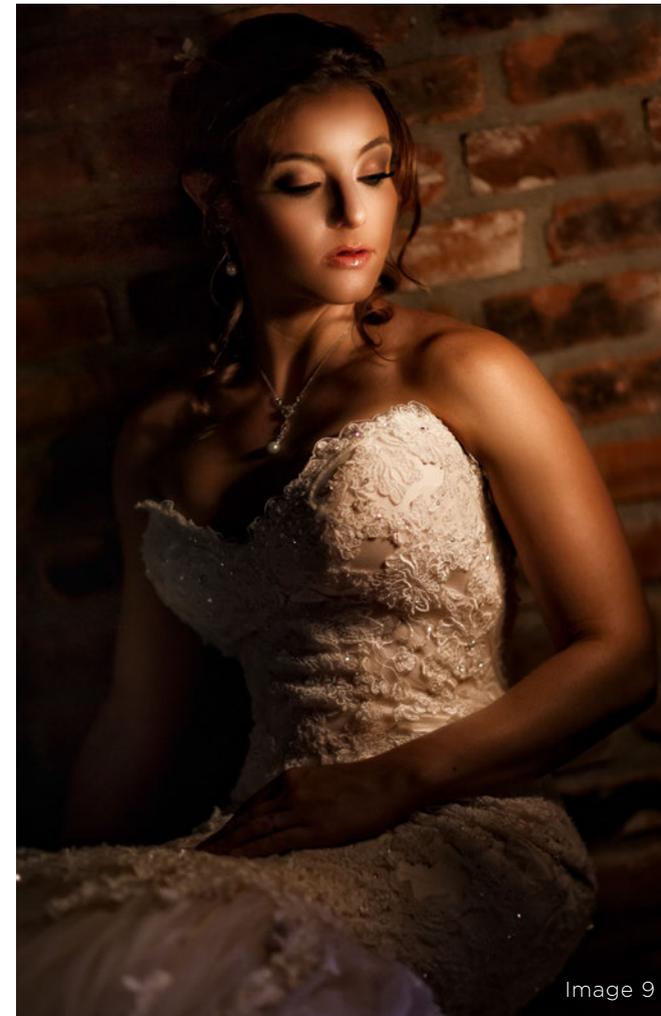


Image 9

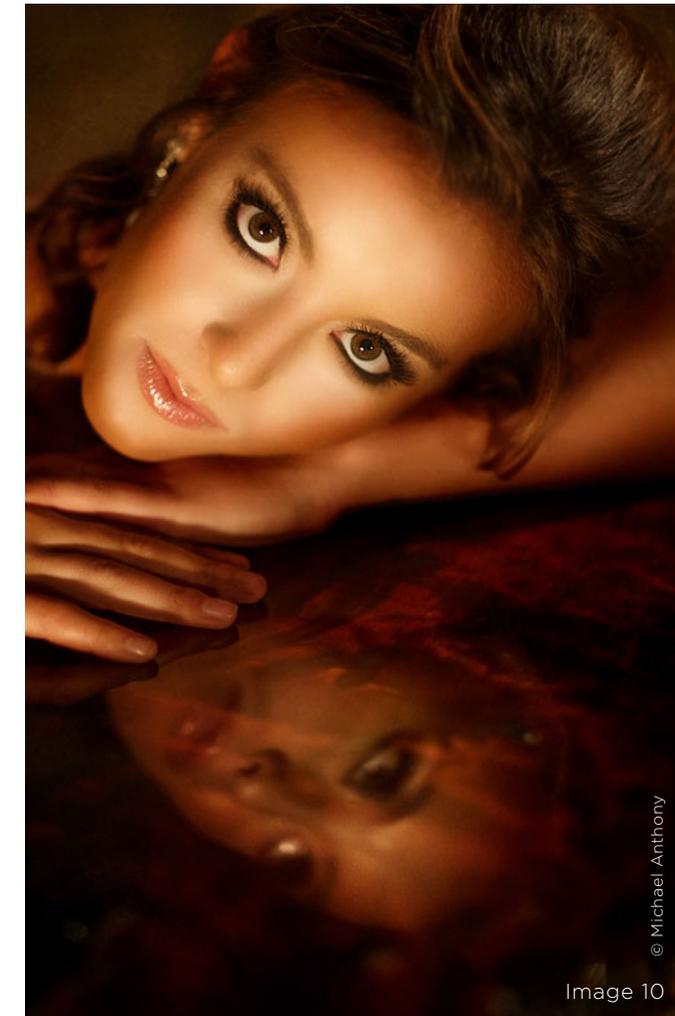


Image 10

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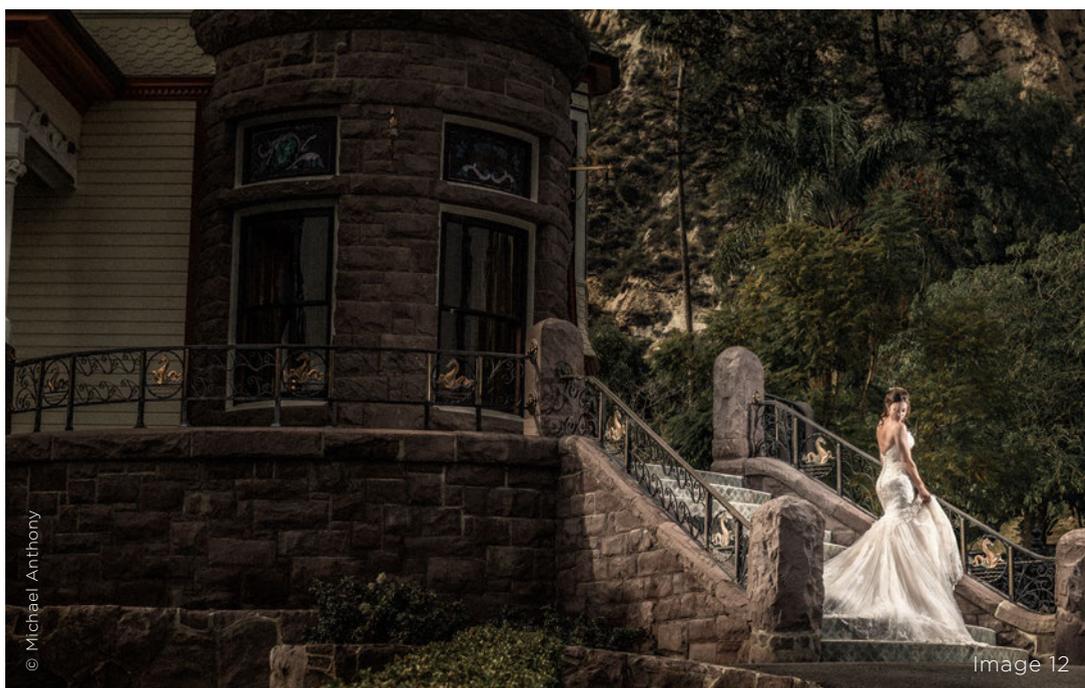
Image 11



Image 12

Tips for Using Reflections

- Reflections can be found anywhere, not just mirrors. Look for water, reflective tables and windows.
- Go outside and use the reflections in a window to frame your subject. By using a flash on your subject inside, you can essentially spotlight the subject and still keep your reflection outside.
- Using good light on your subject makes your reflection more prominent; conversely, the darker the subject is lit, the less obvious the reflection will be.



Getting the Signature Bridal Shot

Your bride has spent hours upon hours researching the perfect dress. It is essential that you photograph her alone to showcase this important decision. Just as you would when photographing a couple together, you must take the time to create a signature art piece of the bride alone. Remember, if you want to charge more for your work, you have to do something that your competitors are not doing. For us, it's the way we use light. Whether it's natural light, flash or a combination of the two, our style incorporates the use of creative lighting to create a distinct look for our clients. I highly recommend stepping out of your comfort zone and experimenting with off-camera flash.

This venue was a Victorian mansion (Images 12, 13 & 14). Because it was so beautiful, incorporating the architecture was essential. I positioned the bride on the stairs with her back to me so I could see the details in her dress as the train cascaded over the stairs. I then used a Profoto B1 with a zoom reflector off-camera to the right, exactly opposite the sun, thereby sandwiching the bride in a combination of ambient light and flash. My assistant held the light on a monopod and angled it downward. By having two directional light sources, texture was created on the dress and a dramatic lighting setup was complete. I then framed our bride to showcase the venue, her dress and her overall shape and beauty. I cannot stress how important it is to get these shots. Take a combination of horizontal and vertical shots to allow for easy positioning in the wedding album.



Tips for Getting the Signature Bridal Shot

- Use dramatic lighting or other unique techniques to set yourself apart from your competition. Remember, this is portfolio time, and these are the images that your potential clients are using as a basis for deciding whether or not to hire you. Do not waste the opportunity to create unique photos and set yourself above the crowd.
- Use creative post-production to further enhance your imagery. These tools are extremely useful for creating a distinct style. Post-production can be used to create a clean and airy edit or a dark, dramatic scene. If you are not good at post-production, then by all means, outsource. We use Evolve Edits for our entire post-production workflow, and they will work with you to accomplish any look you want.
- Showcase all of the wedding details, but most importantly for this image, focus on the gown, the venue and the bride. Your shot needs to take your client's breath away.
- If you nailed it, feel free to show the client the back of the camera to help build her confidence and trust in you.
- Try to create motion in these images. Have the bride swing her train, throw her veil or run through the scene.

These techniques are meant to open your eyes to a different way of shooting. They are not meant to change your style as a whole, but to give you additional tools you can keep in your camera bag whenever you need to approach a situation in an uncommon way. There are many ways to distinguish your style, and finding the right combination is something that will come with time, dedication and practice. ■



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PRODUCT REVIEW

WITH
Salvatore Cincotta



“ You spent thousands of dollars on your camera equipment, **make sure you get a set of sticks that can support the fragile payload.** ”

When it comes to tripods, prices and quality can be all over the board. Each brand and product line is typically made for a specific purpose. I don't know about you, but with all of the travel involved in my business, the last thing I want is to be lugged down with more and more gear. Our camera bags are heavy enough. So, when I add something new to my bag, weight is always a key factor.

With weight, comes the perception of quality. Well, Vanguard hit a home run with this portable tripod. The VEO 235AB provides strong leg locks and a greater load capacity— things we should all be conscious of when it comes to our expensive cameras and lenses. You spent thousands of dollars on your camera equipment, make sure you get a set of sticks that can support the fragile payload.

The quality and ease-of-use are apparent the minute you pick it up. Initially, I was truly shocked at how light it felt, but not like plastic. You can immediately feel the true quality of this product. The VEO 235AB is definitely something I would add to my bag (and by 'would,' I mean 'am' — since I am refusing to return this to them after the review).

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Bridging the
CULTURAL GAP

Ethnic Weddings 101

with Phillip Blume





© Phillip Blume

by **Phillip Blume**

Regardless of what genre of photography you specialize in, to operate as an artist outside your cultural comfort zone is a challenge. Trust me, I've been there. I've lived or traveled extensively in at least 20 countries across five continents. The frustrations are real. The high-stakes, time-crunched game of wedding photography only magnifies the tension.

The widely varied reactions people have toward photography and the expectations they place on photographers are deeply influenced by culture. (In other words, it's nothing personal.) Now ask yourself this: What human event is more imbued in culture and tradition than a wedding? None. So if you're interested in enriching your portfolio with the beauty of ethnically diverse weddings, you'll want to understand and adapt to their special demands.

RESEARCH

I cringe to think how we as wedding photographers have watered down the term *photojournalism* to the point that it's come to mean, "I take pictures of whatever events occur near my camera." As a photographer who holds a professional degree in journalism, I believe we owe it to ourselves and our clients to correct this photojournalistic malpractice. We have to predict where the "story" will happen and go to it, rather than wait for it to come to us. Research ought to be an ongoing part of our work in creating a satisfying experience. After all, client satisfaction is the key that unlocks word-of-mouth publicity and momentum in your business. Yes, many aspects of Western weddings have become predictable to me over time, which can make me lazy. But shooting a different kind of wedding really gets the creative juices flowing.



© Phillip Blume

To research, avoid the temptation to look at other photographers' websites, at least at first. For one thing, photographers who specialize in one brand of "ethnic" wedding fall victim to the same laziness that threatens photographers of Western weddings. Playing the imitation game won't get you the creative storytelling images you're capable of. Also keep in mind that ethnic wedding bloggers don't always post their pictures in chronological order. The complex litany of Indian wedding ceremonies is often simplified for publication—multiday events blending ceremonies and dancing pictures for ease of viewing. Don't trust your eyes and then show up unprepared for the true order of events.

Instead, start your research on Wikipedia. For our first-ever Indian wedding, I exhaustively explored a labyrinth of links related to the ceremonies our couple listed for us: Mehndi, Ganesh Sthapan or Puja, Garba, etc. All of these are distinct from the actual "wedding ceremony," which itself included a number of microceremonies we didn't want to miss. Without research, would you recognize the significance of a family member tweaking the groom's nose? Or might you let it pass as a random joke? Would you know to crawl under the surrounding crowd when the groom arrives for the marriage, ready to capture the moment he crushes a small memento underfoot? Would you be focused on his big toe as he circled for the umpteenth time around the altar, prepared to photograph the men who discreetly pinch his toe against a coin at floor level? Many of these moments are over in a flash, but your client expects you to be ready for them.

ASK QUESTIONS

Throughout the research process, keep an ongoing list of questions that arise. Next, call a friend who is familiar with the culture, or post your remaining questions on social media. Once you've received some general advice, make a final phone call to your couple. They'll appreciate the work you've done, and will help clarify any confusion. Your research may even remind them about rituals they had taken for granted or forgot to mention.

What is considered sentimentally important internationally may surprise you, especially when the culture seems similar to your own. British photographers reading this magazine already know the signing of the marriage document is a lengthy and important part of weddings within the Church of England. (For most U.S. marriages, documents are signed before the wedding day without ceremony.) The first time I photographed a wedding in London, I was set up in the balcony for the signing ceremony. After 15 minutes, I had some great shots and was convinced I'd picked the perfect angle. Then it happened. The couple and their minister rose from the table regally, the groom holding the pen out for display, and they stood there like statues. It looked so unnatural to me. Then I heard them whispering as their eyes grew concerned: "Where's the photographer?" If I'd asked better questions, I could have better met my couple's expectations.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

No matter how much you learn in preparation for your first ethnic wedding, never assume you're an expert when the next one comes around. It's a special challenge for us Americans, who live in such a young and culturally uniform country, to grasp the diversity prevalent in older civilizations. For instance, the Indian ceremonies I mentioned earlier were common for Hindu weddings in the region our couple was from. Yet Hindu weddings in other regions (or from other levels of the caste system) are often distinct, with different traditions or other names for ceremonies that are similar. In other words, there's really no such thing as a "typical Indian wedding."

This is where humility and candor become crucial. Your initial consultation with a couple shouldn't be used to convince them you already know it all. Instead, use the time to express your genuine interest and enthusiasm for their unique wedding. If anything, let your couples know you take great care in learning about and preparing for every event. Get excited and take notes as they describe their customs. Know exactly who they are. Otherwise, your research will get stuck in a quagmire of information overload.



“ Many cultures have
strict rules regarding photography.
Don't gripe.
Do the best you can. ”

ADJUST YOUR WORKFLOW

Make a special point to confirm every desired grouping for family formals. For many cultures, the joining of families is as important as the joining of bride and groom, so our standard list of family groupings doesn't always cut it. Once you have the perfect list, you still may find it more frustrating than usual to organize and direct groups. The language barrier may be an issue, or the families may come from a culture with a completely different concept of punctuality. In these cases, remember that many cultures are more conservative and strongly hierarchical. Many times, the best solution is to designate one older male representative from either side of the family to call everyone together. You'll be amazed how much more quickly people respond to their direction.

Many cultures have strict rules regarding photography. Everyone's familiar with the church that doesn't allow flash photography. Others don't allow photography of the ceremony at all. Don't gripe. Do the best you can. You aren't accountable for what's outside your control. During Buddhist ceremonies, the doors are open on a small shrine that contains a scroll. That sacred scroll may not be photographed under any circumstances. My first experience shooting this ceremony was difficult because I had to avoid the scroll on display right in front of the couple. Even though I didn't photograph it, I did make the monks nervous every time I pointed my camera in its direction. I learned to get my wide shots early and focus on close-ups of the couple later.



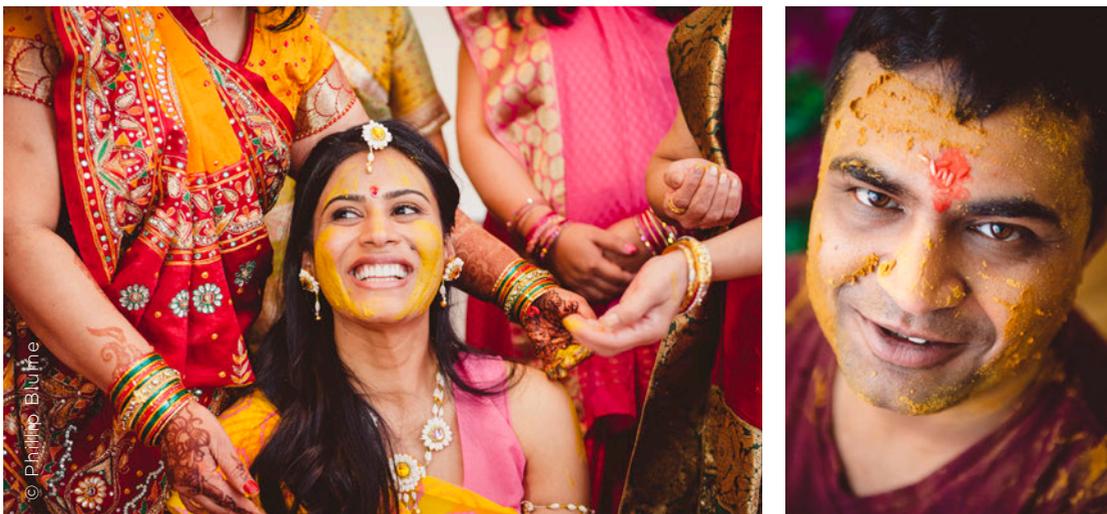
CUSTOMIZE PACKAGES

Any photographer who's experienced a BlumeEDU workshop knows I'm serious about setting prices and sticking to them. Properly structured packages are highly strategic and require no apology. When it comes to ethnic weddings, though, a change may be in order. Remember, your packages may be perfect for your usual audience; but when the logistics of a wedding are wildly different, a new strategy is required. Be ready with that strategy when the inquiry comes in.

Our usual eight-hour package works fine for some ethnic weddings. When we got an inquiry for a second wedding in London, however, we needed to make some adjustments. Offering “unlimited” wedding-day coverage and a free day-after Encore Session to our destination clients helps clinch the booking, while also allowing us to expand our portfolio with images at iconic locations. It's a win-win.

Charging an hourly rate is completely impractical for multiday weddings, especially when long delays exist between events. In this case, you'll need to offer a flat rate that sets a clear expectation for your client. We still set reasonable hours for each day of a multiday affair (e.g., six coverage hours per day), but we break with our usual policy in that coverage hours can be split up and “down time” doesn't count against the clock. Almost inevitably, we still exceed the allotted time; then we have a choice of whether to add hours to the invoice or simply exceed client expectations by gifting the extra coverage.

Indian families generally expect two albums as part of a package, one for each family rather than just one for the couple. We deal in very high-quality wedding books, not the lower-end albums often associated with multibook packages. So to prevent the sticker shock that results from adding another valuable album to our package, we simply offer very special pricing on any book duplicates, especially for our Indian clients. This is both reassuring and valuable to them. It also allows us to ensure the quality of our couple's album—and likely an extra album sale.



SET STYLE EXPECTATIONS

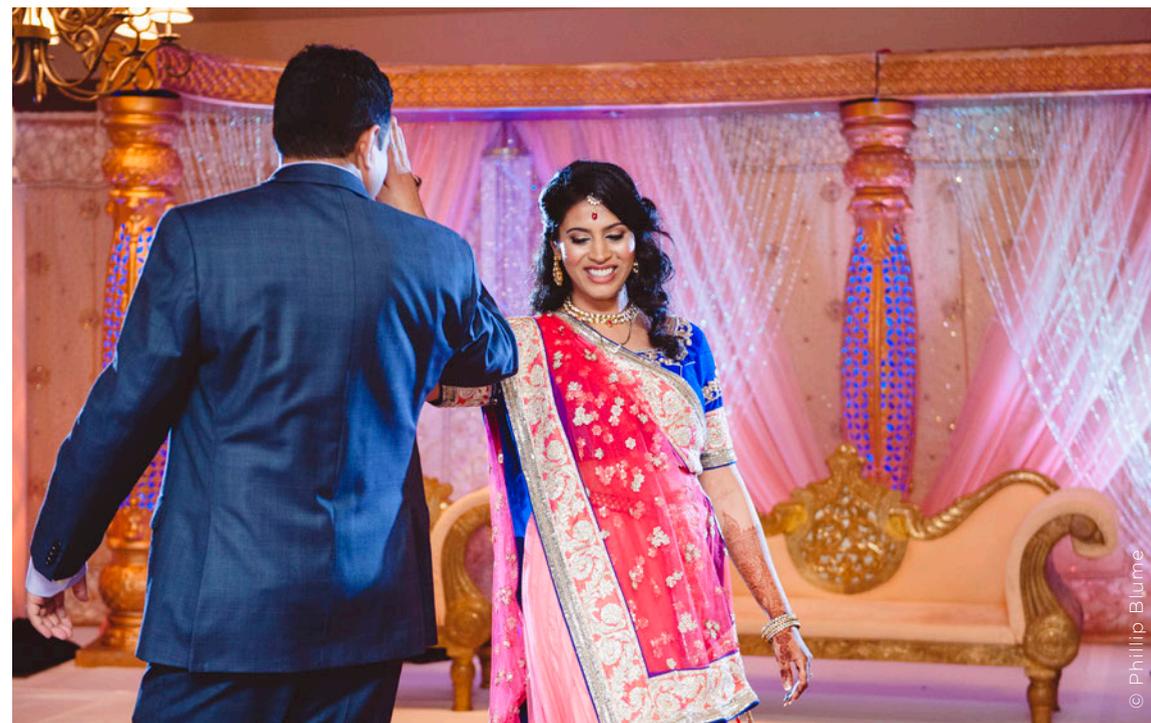
As much as you work to prepare yourself for a culturally unique wedding, don't forget to prepare your couple (and their parents) for what to expect from you. Although some of the best contemporary wedding photographers in the world shoot non-Western weddings, people from these cultures are often accustomed to more traditional styles that we photographers might consider outdated.

One client's parents, who were very pleased with us and the images we had created, were nonetheless deeply disappointed we did not capture more pictures of them interacting with guests. This shocked us since we actually ended up with more pictures of them than we'd ever taken of anyone's parents before. We're accustomed to parents who feign modesty and ask us to delete pictures of themselves. But because of the honor associated with arranging and hosting a wedding in their culture, too few pictures of the parents was almost equivalent to too few pictures of the bride and groom. This mother and father also happened to be the sweetest parents of any client we've worked with. So we gifted them a follow-up family session to make it right.

Our contract includes language asserting we aren't liable for any specific images, as a wedding is an uncontrolled event. But to meet cultural expectations and serve clients, we recommend communicating with both your couple and their parents. Here's how we explain it to them:

"Our style is [photojournalistic, fine art, etc.]. The images we create will be our personal, artistic interpretation of your day. If you want any specific shots, we're happy to take requests, so be sure to let us know. If you want a lot of simple snapshots with your guests, which is understandable, you should also feel free to allow anyone with a point-and-shoot camera to take these for you while we concentrate our talents on creating more-demanding storytelling images."

However you handle such situations, do so with respect and cultural sensitivity. Sure, many photographers have big egos and the talent to back it up. But when it comes to weddings, we are servants first.



CONCLUSION

Shooting weddings outside your cultural norm is a challenge. But the results can be much more than pretty pictures for your portfolio. Like traveling abroad, these are life-enriching, mind-expanding experiences. From the generosity of Chinese couples who have showered us with gifts to the friendship of a Vietnamese-Filipino couple who made us godparents to their child, nothing compares to these experiences that fill our hearts.

When serving couples and their families, honor them with that kind of experience. Remember, your smiling face speaks a universal language. ■

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4 vendor
marketing tips
for high-end
weddings

with **Lori Nordstrom**



by **Lori Nordstrom**

Ah, the wedding day. Many photographers get their start in the industry shooting them. Having a nice camera these days puts you in the category of being a “photographer.” You get asked to take some photos at a friend’s wedding. A few of your pictures get tons of likes, and a bridesmaid asks you to shoot her wedding too. Soon another friend asks, and before long, you’ve got your calendar booked. You’re thinking, I’m pretty good at this!

Reality is, you’re cheap or free, and that’s not very attractive. It hurts, but it’s true. There comes a point when you have to make the choice to raise your prices and start charging appropriately because working your butt off for next to nothing doesn’t stay fun for long. When you raise your prices, you also have to start marketing and getting in front of the right brides, because your current following isn’t going to be excited about the changes. The best way I’ve found to do this is by partnering with other vendors that are already working with your target client.

1 | Figure Out Your Client

Before you start any kind of marketing endeavor, brainstorm whom your perfect bride is. Things to think about:

- Age range?
- First or second marriage?
- Parents paying or couple paying?
- Wedding planner?
- Church wedding, outdoor wedding or destination wedding?
- Formal or casual attire?
- Size of the wedding party?
- Bride’s personality?

The more clearly you can define your target bride, the more you’ll be able to attract that bride. You’ll know better how to communicate with her. You’ll know the things that are important to her and where you can find her.





2 | Build Relationships with Vendors

Once you've defined your target client, start thinking about the vendors she'll be choosing. This starts with the ring. While you might think this is about the guy, you'll find that your higher-end brides already have a favorite jeweler, and her soon-to-be fiancé knows all about it. In fact, he has probably already purchased a gift for her from the jeweler, so there's already a relationship. Jewelers make great partners for your marketing. Offer select jewelers beautifully boxed gift cards for engagement sessions that they can give to their best clients. The card should be presented as if it's coming from the jeweler (not from you) as a thank-you for a purchase and a congratulations. You'll want to take the opportunity to get to know the couple when they come in. Talk to them about your wedding collections and get the sale started.

Another great partner is a wedding coordinator. This is usually where high-end brides start. You can find out who your target client is using by looking through local publications that feature weddings. Feature articles often list all the vendors that were used. Another way to find the right coordinator is through high-end venues. Make a call to select venues and ask what coordinators they recommend. Do some homework before contacting a wedding coordinator for the first time. You want to first let her know how you found her and that you love what she's doing. Compliment first, and then ask for a few minutes of her time in person.

One of the best ways to get in front of people is with your camera. I tell business owners that I'd love to come and get to know them, take a few images of them in their location or with their product, and write an article about them. This article can be for your blog or theirs, for a website or even submitted locally. There aren't many business owners who will turn you down when you make this offer. Wedding coordinators are also great for putting together a stylized shoot. You will both have great portfolio images, which is a win-win. Once you've collaborated on one of these, that coordinator is not going to forget you.

Think through the rest of the wedding-day vendors. Brides work with dress designers, tailors, cake makers, caterers, venues, bands, stationery designers, florists and more. Make a list of these vendors and offer to photograph and write a piece about them for your blog. While doing this, you can make a "preferred vendor" list for brides. Link to these vendors on your website, and provide brides with images and your article. Use a StickyAlbum for your preferred vendor list, and provide the link to each of them.



© Lori Nordstrom

3 | Create a Wedding-Day Worksheet

A questionnaire about the wedding day can be very effective. I call this our “wedding-day worksheet.” It asks about all of the details of the day, starting with basic questions like the bride and groom’s contact info and the address where they will be living after the wedding. It asks the name and role of each person in the wedding.

As the bride works through it, she will start thinking about her day and the most important images to her. I ask if bride and groom will be seeing each other before the wedding (something I try to talk all of my couples into). Reception details are also important, and I ask that any assistants and myself be seated as guests. The last page of the worksheet is all about vendors. I ask the bride for contact information for each vendor, and this is key. I contact each vendor about two weeks before the wedding. I let them know that we will be working together, and tell them I’ve heard such great things about what they do.

The call goes something like this: “Hello, Deborah? My name is Lori Nordstrom, and I am the photographer for David and Susan’s wedding, the Smith-Jones wedding, on the 15th. I’m so excited to meet you. Susan has told me all about the cake. It sounds like you do really beautiful work! I’d love to find out when the cake will be delivered so I can meet you and of course get some images of the cake for you as well.” We’ll discuss details, and I’ll ask if there are any special requests she has for me.

This step in the process goes a very long way in making you a preferred vendor yourself. You will stand out from other photographers, and vendors will tell you this over and over. They aren’t used to this kind of treatment, and they will quickly be endeared to you.

4 | Follow Up After the Wedding

After the wedding, I collect images from each of the vendors and send over web-size images (with my byline, of course). I send these to the vendors along with a note asking them to let me know if there is anything else they need from me. I also offer to print anything they’d like for their business and for any wedding shows they might have coming up. I’ve only done one wedding show. It was my last one, because I was already represented in about a dozen booths—just by being proactive in my networking.

When you network and build relationships with the right people who are already in front of your target client, you will attract the right brides through referral and recognition. This was the only marketing I ever needed to do while shooting weddings in a small Midwestern town that started at \$8,500. I hope some of these ideas will work for you as well. ■

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FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT THINGS

What to Look for—and Why

with Erica Jensen



by Erica Jensen

Weddings are boring. There, I said it. They're choreographed events that follow a scripted timeline. Girl gets ready. Boy gets ready. Boy marries girl. White dress, black tux, yada yada yada. There is no winning sports team, no exploding volcanoes and no skiers ripping down the slopes. What plays out before the eyes of a wedding photographer is, in many ways, predictable and boring. That is, of course, what we see on the surface, from the outside looking in. But down beneath is the way that it feels. And that is an entirely different matter. Weddings feel extraordinary because they represent extraordinary things: the joining together of lives and families, eternal promises, unabashed love.

Recognizing this, and being able to tap into it, is the secret to creating wedding imagery that gets at the deeper layers of what lies beneath the surface of a wedding...the heart and soul of a wedding...the feeling.

This is what David Allan Harvey was getting at when he said, "Don't shoot what it looks like. Shoot what it feels like." This is the ultimate challenge of wedding photography, and the root of what separates compelling, timeless images from those that lack feeling. We can't just give our clients photos that remind them how their day looked, because that's not how they saw it. In fact, it's quite possible they didn't see it at all—they *felt* it.

We have to give them photos that remind them how it felt, or better. So many couples are disappointed with their wedding photos because they just don't live up to their extraordinary memories of the day. What we give them will ultimately influence their memory, and that's a powerful thing. So if we're going to change their memory, we want to enhance it. Uncle Bob, with his Best Buy TDI, can show them how it looked (on Facebook, less than 24 hours later) and spoil their memories. Our ability to show them how it felt has very little to do with knowledge and everything to do with simple awareness. Just knowing what to pay attention to makes all the difference. Too many photographers focus on doing things *right*, when they'd be better off focusing on doing the *right things*.

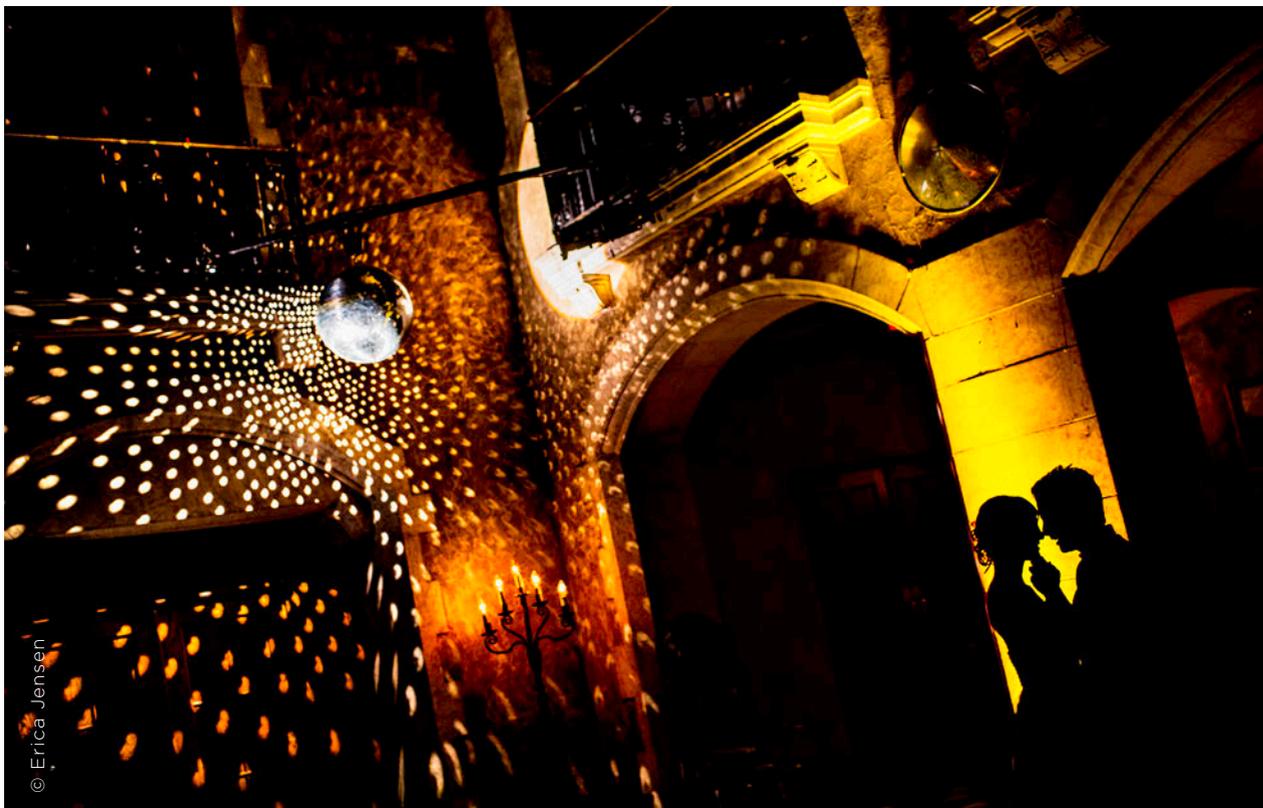
So what do we focus on? We look for and record the extremes and the unexpected. Why? Because that's how we feel. We may see the world in expected colors and boring midtones, but we feel in extremes, we remember the unexpected. That's what leaves impact. That's what we feel. The memorable and impactful is almost always extreme and unexpected.

We apply this approach to light, composition and, most importantly, the moment. Let's look at each.



© Erica Jensen





LIGHT

Stop shooting your bride and groom, and start shooting light and shadow. Our cameras and our eyes are entirely different entities that view and record the world in different ways. Understanding and exploiting the differences is key to creating compelling imagery. Our eyes see the world as scenes and subjects. Our cameras and the photos they produce speak only in light and shadow. And while our eyes can see across a dynamic range of 20 stops, our cameras are limited to five. We deliberately exploit this difference to create extreme and unexpected images. By intentionally over- and underexposing to extremes, we can take advantage of our cameras' limitations and make images that are so much more compelling than what we see (what it looks like). We can add drama, mystery, feeling.

Natural light is almost always our first choice. Exposing for the extreme highlights (or occasionally the extreme shadows) helps us create visually impactful images. Midtones are blah...that's how it *looked*.

When we can't get excited about the natural light, we bust out our speedlights. This is something we would never do if we were afraid to fail, because we fail often with this. But when it works, it can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, the mundane into the insane. My best advice with regards to manufacturing your own off-camera light is to just experiment. Play around. And don't worry: Flash photography is still "available-light photography." If it's in your camera bag, it's no less available than that lamp you can turn on or those curtains you can open. It's available, so use it. Be brave.

And remember, what makes a photo really sing is not so much where the light is, but where it's not. The absence of light is often more important than its presence. We use MagMod grids on our speedlights to help shape and modify our light. This allows us to add light exactly where, and only where, we want. Being able to control your light is an absolute game changer.



COMPOSITION

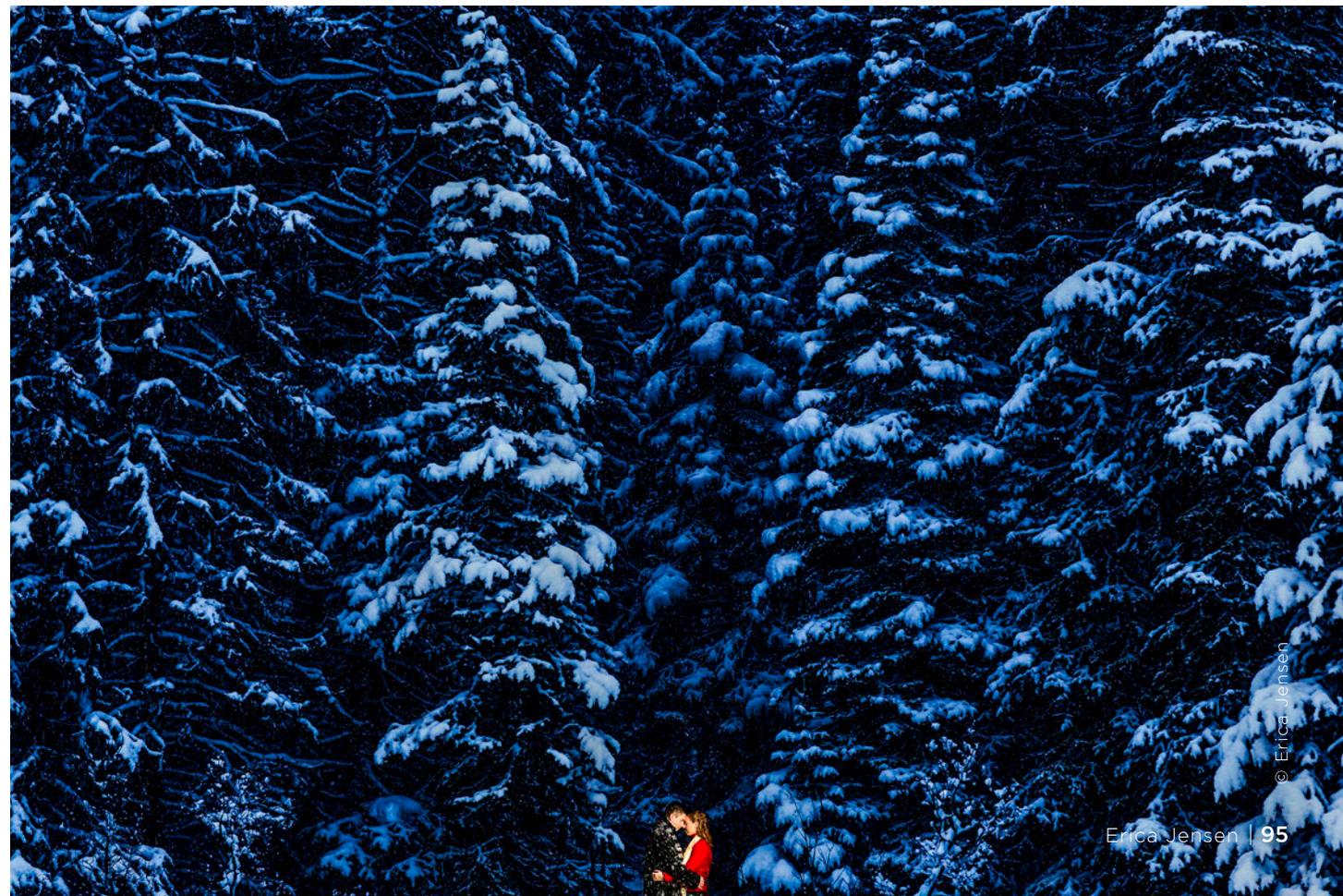
Take all of those stuffy photography rules and throw them out the window. If the goal is extreme and unexpected, then why would we adhere to them? We're artists, not technicians; so don't let the curse of knowledge prevent you from doing something new and exciting. Just compose visually, instinctively, not in accordance to rules. Rather than the rule of thirds, for example, follow the rule of ninths. Experiment. Make your own rules. Once you free your mind about the concept of composition being correct, you can do whatever you want.

The best practical tactic for creating more extreme and unexpected compositions is to get out of the "safe shooting zone." Shooting from 5 to 10 feet away from your subject is boring and expected because that's the way everybody else has already seen it.

Getting close is as critical as it is scary. It requires bravery as a photographer and trust from our clients. The result can be compelling compositions that make our viewers feel as though they were present in the scenes we're photographing.

Shooting from afar can also be extreme and unexpected. Pulling back to reveal the chaos or the enormity of the bigger scene can have powerful storytelling potential.

Basically, the most important thing about composition is that our images are composed in a way that tells the story we're trying to tell, ideally in an extreme and/or unexpected way.





MOMENT

Moments trump everything, always. But not the ones you might suspect. Almost every wedding has a first kiss, first dance, cake cutting, a bunch of toasts, and many other very predictable moments. While these are important to capture, they in no way get at the underlying heart and soul of a wedding.

Weddings are full of so many unexpected moments and stories that fall outside the obvious timeline of the day. It's those unexpected, not so obvious moments and stories that clients treasure. It's our job as wedding photographers to search out and record them. They're happening all around us, constantly, throughout the day. And they require absolutely no direction whatsoever. All we have to do is put our camera where it needs to be to capture it in a compelling manner.

On the surface, weddings are boring, predictable and silly. If you're stuck seeing and shooting on the surface, then your photos are likely to be just as exciting. But beneath the surface, the heart and soul of weddings are extraordinary, unpredictable and moving. Capturing this requires curiosity, bravery and commitment. ■

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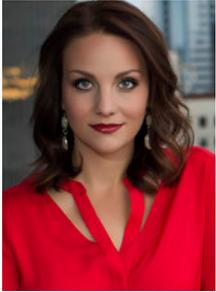
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THE SECOND SHOOTER

— The *Real* Talent —
On a Wedding Day
with **Alissa Zimmerman**



by **Alissa Zimmerman**

For me, wedding days are my time to do what I love most. I'm not a quiet person, by any means, but I hate being in any kind of spotlight—especially when it comes to directing people to execute a vision. This is why Sal and I make the perfect team on a wedding day. When I have an idea for a shot, I can nonchalantly whisper it in his ear, have him direct the clients, let me focus on fine-tuning the details, then, of course, let him take all of the credit when one of those images scores at print competition.

As second shooters, the “moments” of the day rely on us. The moments when we capture raw emotion from the day that are able to bring the family to tears when they see their images for the first time (and time and time again). These images are the ones they will cherish forever, even if they buy them only as 5x7's or 8x10's. It's not about overshooting and praying you just happen to capture that one amazing shot. Being an awesome second shooter really does require skill.

Let's dive right in. There are three basic steps to conquering a wedding day as a team.

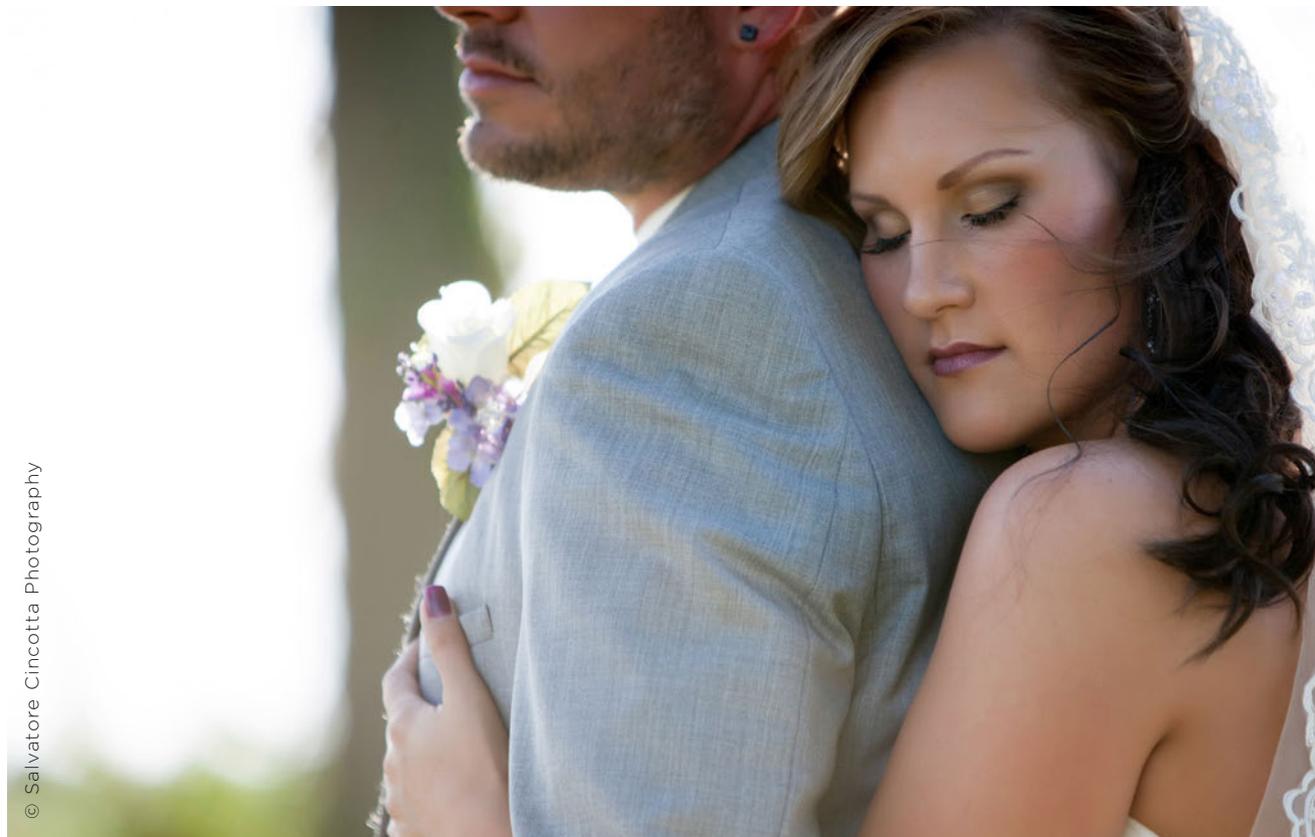
STEP 1 - GET IN SYNC WITH EACH OTHER

If Sal and I are not in sync on a wedding day, guaranteed chaos will ensue (nothing a client sees, of course, but our internal process will be a mess). Put aside your ego and understand that as a second shooter, you also play the role of assistant. This means carrying the bag, running to grab a different lens for your primary (even if you are seconds away from getting the shot) or simply getting a plate of food and a Coke Zero the second you walk into the reception so your primary can start downloading images for the slideshow while you take care of the detail shots of the venue before the entire wedding party arrives. Phew!

STEP 2 - ESTABLISH A PROCESS AND DON'T ABANDON IT

When things go sideways (and there's always something that does), we have an established process to default back to as a safety net. Know the shots you need to get as a second shooter, and *then* experiment. I made the mistake of getting fancy at a wedding about a year ago, and abandoned the process completely. Unfortunately, what I saw was not what the rest of the team saw. None of those shots was usable. Luckily, these experimental shots of mine were taken during the ceremony and Sal had everything he needed to make up for my momentary lapse of judgment. It's all about the 80/20 rule Sal talks about over and over and over. Engrain it into your brain and never get away from it.





© Salvatore Cincotta Photography

“ *Understand and master your role as the supporting character in this crazy, chaotic production known as wedding photography.* ”



© Salvatore Cincotta Photography

STEP 3 - UNDERSTAND AND MASTER YOUR ROLE

Any movie you see, there is always a lead character—the one with the charisma, the star of the show. Then there’s the supporting character—the one who gets shit done. The one who sacrifices everything to make sure the duo is firing on all cylinders at all times. It’s important to establish this dynamic from the beginning between you and the primary shooter so there is no battle for attention. I am always able to joke with our clients while on shoots assisting or second-shooting for Sal. It lightens the mood to be able to laugh about calling Sal a diva or making comments like, “We all know who *really* does the work around here.” But it is important to never undercut your primary shooter for the sake of a few laughs with your clients. This comes across extremely unprofessional, and creates unnecessary tension between you and your primary shooter that your clients can always sense.

Next up, you need to know where you belong throughout each key part of a wedding day: groom prep, bride prep, ceremony, creatives and reception. It is crucial to know where to be and when to be there for every scenario—this is something Sal and I have worked very hard to master as a team. Let me break it down for you from the second shooter’s point of view with a few questions I constantly answer from each portion of the day.

GROOM/BRIDE PREP



Walk into the room, find a place to stage your gear that's out of the way and start gathering details. During this time, your primary is making small talk and letting the group get comfortable with him so they are able to loosen up in front of the camera. For us, once I have everything gathered for Sal to start shooting, he will let the group know they can relax for a bit while we focus on getting the detail shots. This is actually the second shooter's time to shine. Get a zoom lens and transition into sniper mode. The group is in its element now—this is when you get the best candid shots of the bride and groom interacting with their best friends and family.

Question - Where is the best place to stand while the bride and groom are getting ready?

Answer - Out of the primary shooter's way. I always get the shots I need to complement Sal's (i.e., when he's tight, I'm wide, and vice versa), but I always know to stay out of his shots while still capturing the supporting people from that scene (Mom zipping up the bride's dress, etc.).

CEREMONY

This is the easy part of the day, but one of the most high-pressure moments for the second shooter. During the ceremony, there is one main shot that you can't miss: the groom's reaction when he sees his bride coming down the aisle. I always stand right up front by the altar, opposite the groom, so I can get a nice shot with him in the left third of the frame. This is perfect for the album to complement the shot of the bride looking back at him (something that comes off of the primary photographer's camera).



Question - Where should the second shooter go after getting the money shot of the groom at the altar?

Answer - Make sure to get the handoff between the bride and her father, then hustle to the back of the room while all the guests are still standing up so you don't draw any unnecessary attention to yourself.



CREATIVES

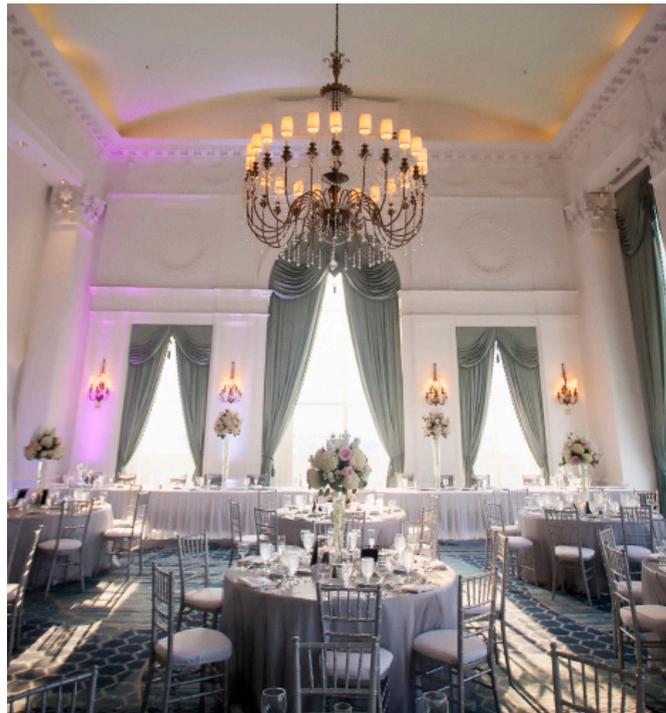
For Sal and me, this part of the day is when everyone gets to watch our well-oiled machine in action. It's important to have a plan of attack ready beforehand (locations planned, understanding of available time in each spot, specific shots needed, etc.) so you're able to move at a fast pace and keep the wedding party energized for the reception. This is the perfect opportunity for us to show the bride and groom that they are in good hands, that they can actually enjoy this time with their friends instead of worrying whether or not their day will be properly documented.

Question - For the group shot, where should you stand when your primary shooter is standing dead center with a wide-angle lens?

Answer - Directly above and behind him/her to grab the tight and mid-shots of the bride/groom, or off to the side with a zoom lens getting tight on details (bouquets, garters, the bride and groom holding hands, etc.).

Question - When you arrive at a location and your primary is cracking jokes with the group to get them warmed up, what should you be doing?

Answer - Shooting! Sal tells the same stupid jokes at every wedding. They're not funny anymore. But for some reason, our clients and their friends and family members seem to think he's the funniest man alive. *This is prime time for genuine, candid interaction.* Don't kill the mood by shoving a camera in their faces, though—just like during groom and bride prep time, put on a zoom lens and go into sniper mode.



© Salvatore Cincotta Photography

RECEPTION

The reception, with our internal process in play, is all about the second shooter (especially in the beginning before guests arrive). Like I mentioned earlier, once Sal and I arrive at the reception venue, it's game time for him to start downloading images to build the slideshow. This is when I make sure to nail the detail shots—these shots are nice for the bride and groom to have for memories of their day, but most importantly, these are the shots we send to the vendors (for free) to build relationships.

Question - Where should you be when your primary shooter is using a macro lens to get a detail shot of the rings?

Answer - Right by his/her side with some sort of light source to make sure you're helping that person get the best shot possible.

So now that you understand the power of the second shooter, get out there, own your No. 2 title and give your clients the best experience and supporting imagery that will last a lifetime. ■

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4

HOW TO APPROACH
— **FILM** —
THIS WEDDING SEASON

with **Joe Switzer**





by **Joe Switzer**

Big changes are happening just in time for wedding season. Every year as we approach the first wedding of the year, my team and I take a step back and collect our wedding thoughts. Our goal is to have a tremendously successful wedding season. What do you want this year for your weddings? I want to give you ideas for gear, workflow, delivery, client interaction, social media, same-day edits, pricing and music. As you read this, write down your game plan, focusing on these eight categories to ignite your wedding workflow.

What gear should you consider for 2015? Before your next shoot, take inventory of what you have. If you're not using it, put it up on eBay. We keep a clean inventory of gear, and if it's not being used, we sell it or give it away. No need to fall in love with your gear and stockpile it. Clutter and old technology will only distract you and keep you from reaching your potential. New technology is always coming out. You don't need to refinance your house just so you can afford all the newest gear. It's a good idea to always be planning and budgeting for new gear.

The gear we are using for 2015 filmmaking (Figure 1) are three Sony A7s cameras, a Glidecam HD-4000, a Manfrotto monopod and tripod, Canon lenses, Sony audio attachment XLR-A1M, a Rhino Slider Pro 2ft, a SHAPE cage, a Zoom field recorder, Lectrosonic UCR100 wireless mics, and a Think Tank belt/pouch/bag.

Carrying around all of your technology can bog you down and make you miss very important filmmaking moments. It's critical that you have the Think Tank bag or something similar so you can easily carry around and capture video shots quickly. You don't want to be digging around looking for lenses, audio attachments, cages, cables, batteries and cards. Keep your gear insanely organized in that bag. We attach and load all the gear we can so we can start shooting right out of the bag instead of wasting time connecting things. By the way, if you don't have the \$10,000 budget for the newest copter or fully loaded handheld gimbal, don't worry. Outsourcing or renting the gear is your solution. If the right wedding comes along that needs an aerial shot or two, think about outsourcing or renting.



1) Manfrotto Tripod with Fluid Head Mount 2) Manfrotto Monopod with Fluid Head Mount 3) Sony A7s 4) Glidecam 4000 HD 5) Shape Cage 6) Rhino Slider Pro 2ft 7) Duzi Slider by Cinevate 8) Sony XLR-A1M 9) Lectrosonic UCR100 Wireless Mic

Figure 1



© Joe Switzer

Simplified Editing Workflow and Delivery

How long does your editing take? Are you one of those who has a six-month or even a one-year backlog? Perhaps it's time to take a look at what your final product is and simplify it. In order for you to feel enthusiastic about your edits, it's important to keep your backlog down to a minimum. My team and I are 100 percent caught up and ready for wedding season. We are excited to jump on that first wedding edit of the year. The reason we're all caught up this year is because we offer a music video and a full-coverage add-on. That's it. If you're one of those spending a week editing 20-minute short features with audio, perhaps it's time to change what you offer.

Remember that your wedding clients don't know what a wedding video should look like. They don't know if their video should be one minute or three hours in running time. The final product you offer should be something you believe in and are passionate about. Many of you are just offering longer films because you heard that's what brides and grooms want. Almost all of our clients get the three- to four-minute music video, and this year we are switching from DVD to a jump drive for final delivery. This will allow us to be completely caught up all year long. We believe in our final product, and it's the best way to simplify the editing process. Think about what final edit you want to deliver this year and the consequences of your actions.

Client Interaction

How many filmmakers just show up on the wedding day and meet the bride and groom for the first time? What do you think their comfort level is with you putting a camera in their face with a monopod, Glidecam and track after knowing you for only a few minutes? With all of our couples, we make it a priority to take them out for dinner and drinks. We want to become friends with our clients before we just show up on wedding day with all this gear in their face. In addition to the meeting, we are communicating with dozens of emails and phone calls, creating a detailed customized schedule for their wedding day. What about the photographer? Don't just let the photographer take over. Meet with the photographer, even if it's just over the phone. You are playing on the same team, so you need to know each other. The quality time you spent getting to know the couple and photographer, plus a good game plan, will give you more time to get all the shots you ever dreamed of to make great wedding films.



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Social Media Uploads

Most brides and grooms view their wedding video on YouTube, Vimeo or Facebook. Which service should you use? Do you upload it to all three? Vimeo is our favorite because it gives you password protection and downloading options, and it makes it easy to send links via text, email and even Facebook. We use YouTube for videos we make for fun, but it's rare. This year, we will be uploading our videos directly to Facebook because that gets more shares and views, but we're also still uploading to Vimeo. YouTube looks and feels like too much advertising for our videos, and we want something clean for our clients. Most importantly, upload your videos to the platform that your fans and followers are most responding to and engaging with.

Restructured Same-Day Edits

For the last decade, we have depended on the DJ or the band to connect our wireless transmitter and receiver to output the sound for the same-day edit. This year, that comes to an end. For years, we have been frustrated with inadequate sounds. With the DJ or band in charge, they never played it loud enough and were often difficult to work with. It's important that you are in control when you can be. New audio technology allows you to transport high-quality sound that can fit in a bag and be turned on in just minutes. You don't need to bring your five speakers, receiver and sub. The new audio systems have everything combined into one speaker. Head to your local speaker or sound retail store and listen to the system options. Find the best system that suits your needs. Consider price, size, ease of use and quality.

Pricing Changes

It's time to increase your prices and make tweaks to your pricing form. You should always be trying to improve your wedding package information to increase your wedding revenue. We keep it simple and offer only what we want to sell. Sal's pricing strategy is a major influence. We basically use his template. Find a company that you have tremendous respect for, and see how they present their packages and pricing.



Music Pipeline

You need to go into every wedding knowing the music you will be licensing and editing to. If it's a slower song, you might consider shooting more slowly than if you were using a fast and upbeat song. We have started researching the SongFreedom music library and favoriting the songs we want to use for 2015. I suggest you do the same. Some of the artists we will be using are American Authors, OneRepublic, Imagine Dragons, Phillip Phillips, Tyrone Wells, Zerbin, Caleb Lovely, Little and Ashley, and Mat Kearney. Almost every week, new music is being uploaded. You and your team should know the song you're shooting for before the wedding day. Sometimes our clients are excited to choose their own music, and we will email them a playlist with the top songs we think would be a good fit for their wedding. Match your music to the style and theme of the wedding. Just because you like hipster music doesn't mean that genre is a good fit for all your weddings this year.

Your workflow and wedding filmmaking business can be what you want it to be. Make your own rules and all the filmmaking decisions. Take notes and write down what ideas you are going to implement in 2015 when it comes to gear, workflow, delivery, client interaction, social media, same-day edits, pricing and music. Happy filmmaking! ■



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ONE-LIGHT
— LOCATION —
BRIDAL PORTRAITS

with Michael Corsentino





by **Michael Corsentino**

There's no perfect camera setting recipe for every scenario. Every situation is different. The guidelines here will help get you in the ballpark and arm you with the knowledge you need to make informed decisions. Knowing why and how is the most important concept to master.

Finding the Light

One of the first things I look at when creating bridal portraits that I plan to augment with flash is the overall ambient light conditions. "Ideal" shots are typically in open shade or are backlit, but side-lit scenarios are what I'm looking for. These allow me the flexibility to work with even light and then add flash at whatever strength fits the desired mood for the images I want to create. If a harder look is more to your liking than contrasty, then natural lighting conditions might serve you better as your starting point. But for this shoot, I wanted to create a flattering, natural-looking blend between the available light and fill flash.

Don't Overlight

Resist the temptation to overlight your images (unless that's what you're going for). Just because you can doesn't mean you should. Sometimes a bold lighting statement that says, "Look at me, I'm artificially lit" is what you want because it really makes your image sing. Other times, it can end up being a major distraction or, even worse, looking amateurish.

During ShutterFest, I noticed a tendency toward overly lit images among many of the electronic print competition entries. I get it: When you're getting started with off-camera lighting, it's easy to get carried away with the excitement and wow factor flash can bring to an image. But remember the mission of your image, and be true to that with your lighting. Let subtlety rule the day. Think of lighting like salt when you cook. A little boosts flavor, while too much ruins the dish in a hurry.



Figure 1



Figure 2

© Michael Corsentino

Figure 1 - The first step is to establish your ambient exposure. Do this before turning on your speedlights or strobes.

Figure 2 - Here's an example of an exposure more heavily weighted toward flash than ambient. It has a dramatic "flashy" look; sometimes that's exactly what you want. But for this series of portraits, I wanted a soft, natural-looking blend between flash and ambient.

Balancing Flash and Ambient Light

Understanding how to balance flash and ambient light is a challenge for many people getting started with off-camera flash. Let's break it down to its simplest terms. With ambient and flash contributing to the same exposure, you've essentially got two separate zones or sources of light you're working with. Each of these sources requires independent control to achieve the desired result. You may want less ambient light for a dramatic day-for-night look, or maybe it's a subtle fill flash you're after.

Independent control of flash and ambient is easy once you know how to do it. The camera controls you'll be focusing on the most are shutter speed, aperture and ISO, and flash exposure compensation in the case of speedlights and TTL-capable strobes. Remember that aperture controls the amount the flash contributes to the exposure, while shutter speed controls the amount that ambient light contributes. In the event you've set your desired aperture and want less or more flash, you'll use flash exposure compensation to control the flash output (speedlights and TTL-capable strobes). ISO controls the impact, or sensitivity changes, that aperture and shutter speed will have overall.

Step by Step: Determining Your Exposure

Whether you're working in manual or TTL, the workflow is the same. The first thing you'll need to do is establish your ambient exposure, which provides a solid starting point for your image. I recommend doing this before ever turning on a speedlight or strobe. Dealing with one variable at a time is much easier than starting with both ambient and flash at the same time. During this first step, you'll decide how much ambient light you want contributed to the exposure.

As previously outlined, slower shutter speeds deliver more ambient light, while faster shutter speeds deliver less. In other words, if you're looking for a natural-looking balance between daylight and flash, you'll want to choose a shutter speed that maintains detail in the sky (if you have one in your shot) but that isn't too underexposed. Depending on conditions, this is typically achieved by deterring the balanced exposure reading provided by the camera's meter and then slightly underexposing by a half to a full stop. Conversely, if you're looking for a moody dark-sky look, you'll want to underexpose your ambient exposure by a full stop or two, maybe more. In many cases, trying to achieve this look will cause you to quickly exceed your camera's maximum sync speed as you boost your shutter speed to bring down the ambient light contributed. This is when high-speed sync (HSS) saves the day.

Keep in mind that because of the way HSS works, you can expect a serious reduction in the output of your speedlight/TTL-equipped strobe. You may need to gang up several speedlights/strobes to maintain the power output you need. High-speed sync allows you to exceed your camera's maximum sync speed so you can substantially knock down the ambient in an exposure using shutter speeds up to 1/8000 of a second. Most cameras' sync speeds are somewhere between 1/125 and 1/200 of a second, so you can see just how much flexibility HSS gives you.

In the event you're working with manual strobes or manual speedlights and you've reached your maximum sync shutter speed, you'll need to rely on stopping down your lens to reduce ambient light while also boosting the output of your strobes to compensate for the overall loss of light reaching the camera's sensor. I'll be writing more about additional ways to use HSS in upcoming articles.



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Figure 3

Figure 3 - Feathering my light and a natural-looking balance between flash and ambient create a soft, pleasing look for this location bridal portrait.

Using a Light Meter to Determine % of Flash

One exceptionally fast and accurate way to determine the balance between the flash and ambient contributions in an exposure is to use a handheld flash meter. My meter of choice is the Sekonic L-758DR for a number of reasons. One of them is its ability to provide a numerical reading of the percentage of light being contributed by my flash. For example, if my meter told me that 20% of the light in my exposure came from my flash, it would easily follow that 80% of the exposure came from the ambient light in the scene. This is important because by knowing the effects created by using different percentages of flash, you can determine the overall look of the exposure and know when to use one percentage over another.

Basically it works like this: 20% to 30% flash provides a nice natural fill light, 50% flash creates a 1:1 relationship with ambient, and 70% to 80% will overpower the sun. This method provides quick feedback and an easy-to-use shorthand for creating the balance you want. These images are right in that 20% to 30% fill flash range.

Lightweight, Portable Tools

The right tools make all the difference. This is especially true with weddings and location work. In general, I'm looking for lightweight, supercompact and easy-setup/tear-down tools. My go-to for this type of scenario is Lastolite's line of collapsible softboxes, octabanks, reflectors, diffusers and extension poles.

For this shoot, I used the following equipment:

- Lastolite Ezybox II Medium Octa 31.5" Softbox LL LS2720 to provide a natural-looking circular catchlight and plenty of soft light due to its internal and external diffusion panels.
- Lastolite Ezybox II Speedlight Bracket LL LS2701 so I could gang up two flashes in the event I needed more power.
- Lastolite Non-Rotating Extending Handle (29" to 91") LL LS2453 for on-the-move shooting where light stands don't apply. (I don't mean to sound like a Lastolite commercial. There are plenty of great options out there, but these are just the tools I use.)

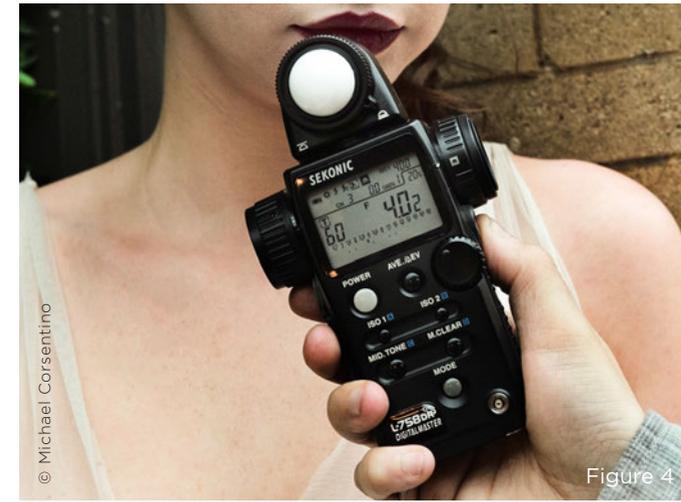


Figure 4

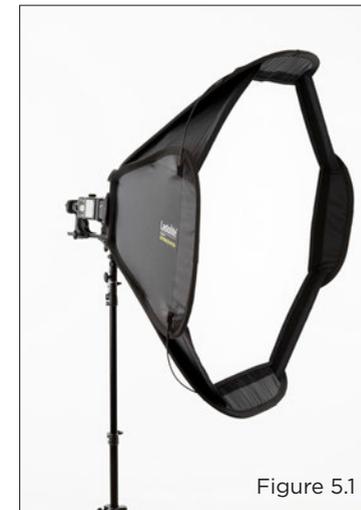
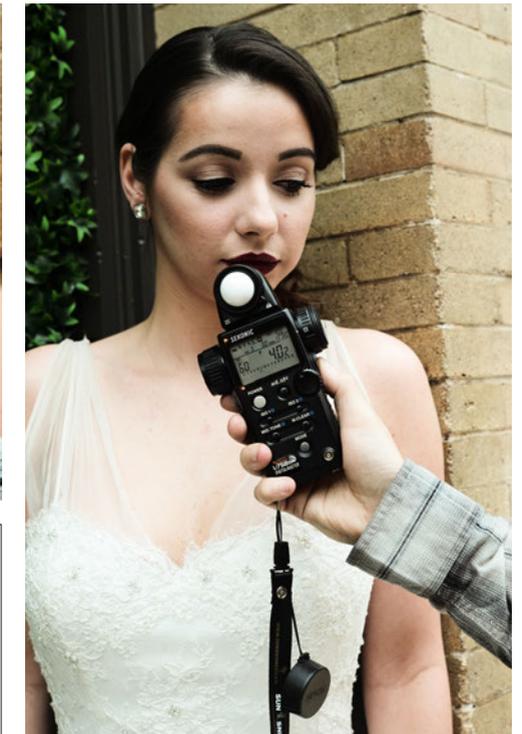


Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3

Figure 4 - Using a flash meter is a great way to quickly and accurately read the percentage of light contributed by the flash. 20% to 30% is the perfect range for creating a natural-looking fill-flash balance between flash and ambient.

Figure 5.1-5.3 - Two layers of diffusion material, a natural-looking catchlight and superportability make the collapsible Lastolite Ezybox II Medium Octa 31.5" Softbox the perfect fit for on-the-go location work.

The Lastolite Ezybox II Speedlight Bracket lets you mount two speedlights on the same bracket, perfect for those times when HSS demands more power.

I constantly use these Lastolite Ezybox Hotshoe Extension Handles (28.7"-87") because they're sturdy and compact, they don't rotate and they avoid light-stand permit issues on location.



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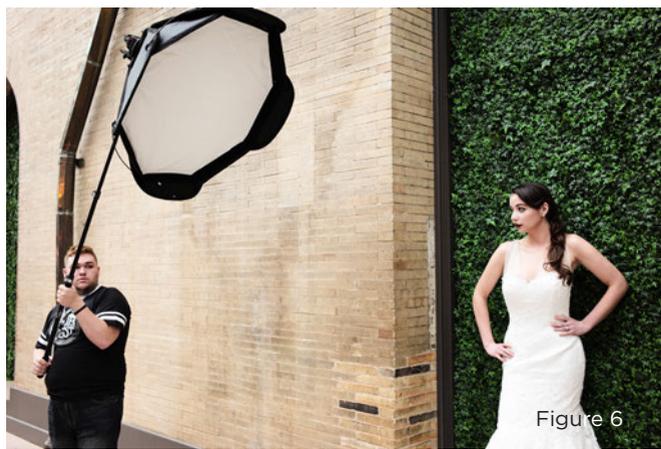


Figure 6

Figure 6 - Aiming your light modifier—in this case an octabank—slightly past your subject helps avoid the center hotspot that occurs in most modifiers.

Feathering Your Light

You don't need a ton of lights to create beautiful location portraits. You just need to know how to control the tools you have. These portraits were created using just one speedlight and a collapsible octabank. When it comes to controlling the softness of flash, one must-have technique is feathering (Figure 6). The great thing about softboxes and octabanks, unlike umbrellas, is that they have a definitive edge where the light output begins to fall off. This falloff actually starts from the center of a softbox/octabank, where there is a hotspot of light, and moves outward toward the modifier's edge and beyond. This is where the light becomes much softer and "feathered."

It's this range outside the middle of the softbox/octabank where you'll find the ultimate soft-light sweet spot. Work the edges of your lights rather than the middle for the best results. Aim them slightly past your subjects for the softest light. This way, they'll fall into the softer, feathered part of the light rather than the harsher hotspot in the center. ■

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8 SECRETS TO
LOVING WEDDINGS
FOREVER

with **Blair Phillips**



by **Blair Phillips**

Most every photographer has shot a wedding at some point. And many photographers who have shot weddings say they'll never shoot another as long as they live. But that's likely due to a lack of research, planning and preparation. A wedding business can be very enjoyable, and it can be also financially rewarding for you and your family. I have been photographing weddings for 11 years, and am so grateful for all the skills I've gained. Weddings can bring you to tears as you get caught up in various moments, but also bring you to tears with all the things that can go wrong.

MARKET RESEARCH

To be successful at weddings, you first have to know your market. Research wedding photographers in your area and look at the price points all the way from low end to high end. Consider how much your time and labor are worth.

PRICING

One of the biggest reasons photographers get burned out from weddings is their pricing. There is nothing worse than looking at all the emotion and labor you put into a wedding only to find that you made very little profit. Your pricing has to be high enough that when you leave the house on a Saturday, you are excited to know you are making really good money. The amount of stress and liability on your shoulders should come with a financial reward. If you feel guilty presenting couples with a high price tag, think about all the money you have invested in your equipment. I also had no problem adjusting my prices when I started thinking about the family time I miss on Saturdays.



© Blair Phillips



TIME

Weddings are so much more enjoyable when you shoot for six hours and then go home. They are generally an all-day affair that goes well into the night. When I started out, I did not have specified time constraints. Brides would expect me to be there all day and night. It did not take me long to realize I was getting burned out really quickly. I sat down and started looking through some of my completed wedding albums. I studied what pictures generally made it into the album. I quickly realized that I could photograph everything I needed in six hours. All the late-night reception images of the drunken guests were not really needed. So we implemented a six-hour time frame into our wedding collections.

My wedding coverage begins 2.5 hours before the ceremony. That allows ample time to photograph everything I need leading up to the wedding. That also allows plenty of time to photograph the reception. This is only successful with lots of prior education and communication with the couple and their families. The wedding planner and reception DJ have to know that you are on a schedule and have to leave at a certain point. So they know that the evening festivities will need to take place before your time ends.

EQUIPMENT

Because everyone has a camera and thinks they know how to shoot, it takes a lot of equipment to make your work stand out these days. If you are using lighting, you must make everything very portable and easy to set up. Most scenarios will not allow you tons of time to set up and break down. Everything I need is on wheels and extremely portable. This makes things easily reproducible. Most of my wedding receptions require lighting that I bring. To keep my stress level down, I bring four studio lights with umbrellas. I place them in opposite corners of the room, with all of them pointing toward the center. They are raised up high enough that they do not create an eyesore. The output is generally different on all four to prevent flat lighting.

If you struggle with reception lighting, take a day off and go practice. Once you have a good grasp on what works for you, write notes of all your settings so you can reproduce it the next time.

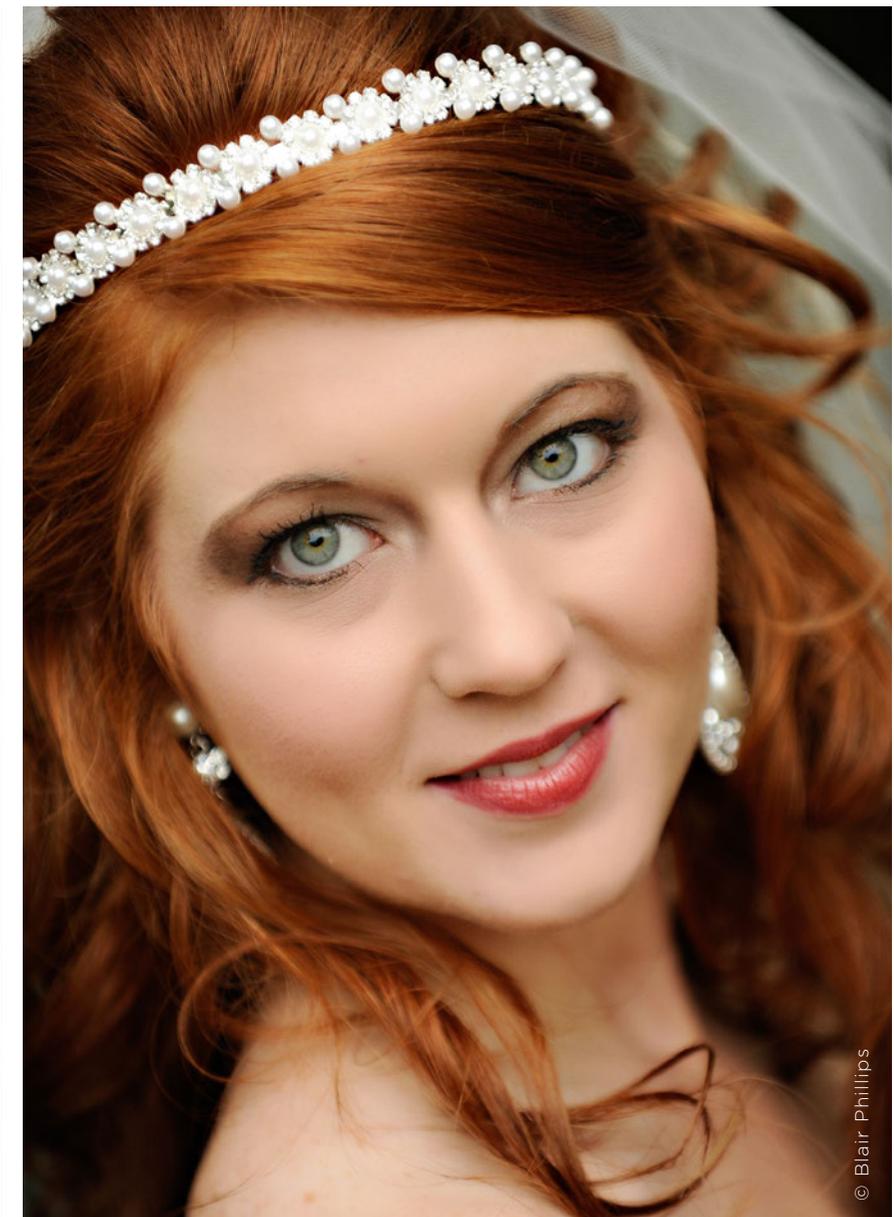
REST

Sometimes too much of a good thing can turn into a negative. Even though weddings can be very enjoyable and highly lucrative, give yourself a break to recharge. Having an occasional weekend for rest and recreation is key to ensuring you remain fresh and do not burn out.

There was one year that I photographed 50 weddings. The money was nice, but I began to dislike weddings. I took those emotions as a wakeup call to slow down. The way I combated that was by raising my prices. This allowed me to do fewer weddings but keep a similar profit. Your work will begin to suffer if you shoot every single weekend.



© Blair Phillips



© Blair Phillips

PLANNING

Your planning should include looking at the weather forecast, especially if you'll be working outside. If you're shooting a midsummer wedding on a 90-degree day, you should not rely on an occasional stop by a water fountain. Pack lots of water, snacks and sandwiches. Respect the needs of your body in stressful environments. Dehydration, fatigue and headaches shouldn't be on the invite list. You are the star of the show, and the show must go on without interruption. Weddings are stressful enough, so take the time to take care of yourself.

COMMUNICATION

There are certain people you should communicate with prior to a wedding who are often overlooked. These are the wedding planner and the directors of the wedding and reception sites. Call them and introduce yourself. Take a few moments to familiarize them with your style of working. Ask if there are any rules for photographers at their venue. This shows respect, and it will put you on the top of the referral list. It can also eliminate surprises once you are there working. The wedding planner is probably the most important person to have on your side. Planners should know what kind of time you need to successfully do your job.



EDUCATION

Your couple, their families and wedding attendants need to be properly educated prior to the wedding as well. They hired you because they love your work. They need to be educated on all that it takes to create what you do. Let them know that in order to create the caliber of work they will be happy with, you require complete participation and cooperation. Walk them through a timeline. Express how important it is for all parties to be punctual. Successful photography should not fall solely on your shoulders. Keep this conversation friendly, lighthearted. Don't come across as bossy or controlling.

There is no greater feeling than watching a bride's eyes well up with tears of joy when she opens her wedding album for the first time. There is also no worse feeling than an angry mother of the bride. Following these fundamentals will help keep your creativity sharp and ensure your longevity.

If you do a superb job and deliver what you promise, word of mouth may be all you need to maintain and grow your business. The trick is to never let the potential stress of a wedding overtake you, and remember that they hired you because they really like you. ■



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IDENTIFYING TRENDS

POST-PRODUCTION IN **WEDDING** PHOTOGRAPHY

with Laurin Thienes





by **Laurin Thienes**

I shot my first wedding on Kodak Portra 400VC. I went through nine rolls of film in about 300 frames. I didn't even bring an entire brick with me. I've been in or overheard countless conversations between photographers yearning for those days when you had to make every shot count. There was only one main look: the look of what got printed from your chromes or negatives. Then along came the affordable DSLR, and everything we knew started to evolve. With that constant change came the explosion of Photoshop actions, wild post-production styles and some horrific processing I'm sad to admit I fell for. If you want to create lasting images for your clients, you have to keep up with the constantly changing trends.

I remember using the first set of Kubota actions (Figure 1). They were revolutionary at the time. The ability to click a button and give your images a supersaturated glow or oversharpen every image: It was something so anti-film that it actually looked good to people at the time. But that was acceptable at that time due to the overwhelming acceptance that just because it was digital meant that every image had to be processed. I wonder what some of those couples think of their pictures now. To even the untrained eye, images like this have a specific feel of post-production to them.

So why do some of these trends flame out? The same thing that drove their acceptance is now behind their shunning: Tastes change. Look around. When did the last sets of unique Photoshop actions or Lightroom presets come out? Years ago. The companies that used to frequently release revolutionary action sets seemingly have stopped producing anything new. The presets that are available are minor iterations from the previous versions. Trends tend to stabilize, and so you don't see bold new introductions anymore.



Figure 1

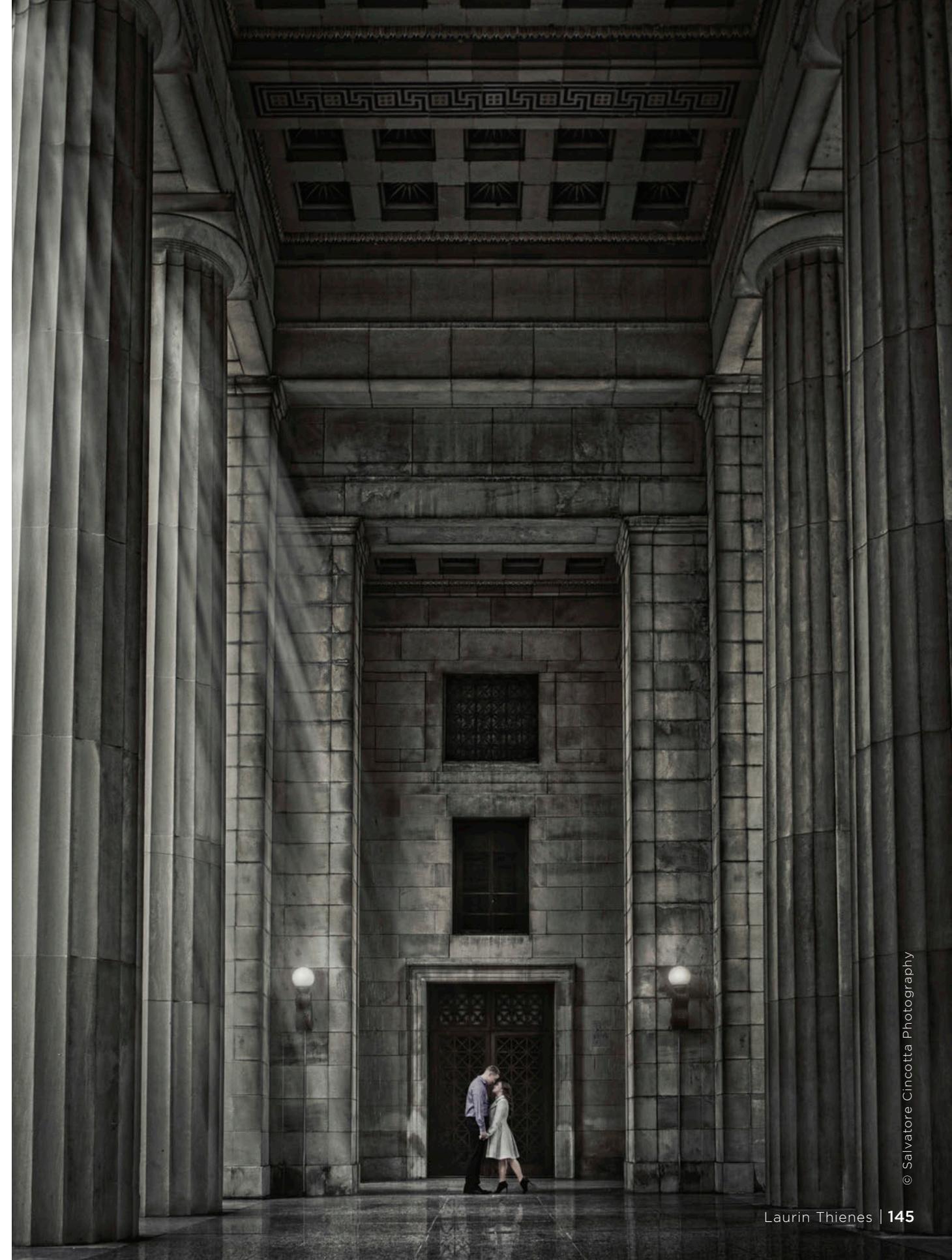




Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

R.I.P THE FOLLOWING TRENDS

BW Colorization

Those high-contrast BW images, with the bright red flowers popping off the print. It became commonplace and easy to make these images. Clients loved them, but soon that faded because it was no longer unique. It's become the laughingstock of the entire photographic community (Figure 2).

Hypersaturation

When the entire wedding day looks like this, you know you have a problem. There might be a time and place to take an image to this level today, but to brand this as a specific style is not something any seasoned pro would do (Figure 3).

Super Glow

Gaussian blur at its best. The ethereal glow that was done tactfully by using filters on one's Hasselblad made its debut in processing between 2005 and 2008. It's hard to find even novice photographers displaying this look today (Figure 4).



Figure 5 | AFTER

© Samplawski Photography



Figure 5 | BEFORE

Figure 5

This image takes a subtle use of texture and some light dodging and burning to drive the viewer directly to the subject. The sky, while not the original sky, is still believable and not overpowering.

History must not repeat itself. With these trends long gone, it is time, once again, to focus on making good images that we'll be proud of in years to come. So what trends have lasted the test of time? Well-made images that are processed in a way that helps drive the viewer directly to the subject; post-production that adds to the images and enhances what is right and not covering up what is wrong.



Figure 6 | AFTER



Figure 7 | AFTER



Figure 6 | BEFORE

Figure 6

When art-directing the original straight-out-of-camera image, we did not want to stray too far from the reality of the scene that the couple was in. However, we had to take it further to create the fine-art piece we envisioned. The addition of texture this time was used to help even out the tonalities between the two train cars in order to not distract from the couple. The grungy tonality across the image fits the railroad track location, and helps bring the viewer directly to the couple's kiss.

Do you risk misidentifying a fading trend? Absolutely. In the same breath, an argument could be made that “cutting edge” could be code-speak for “will fade soon.” However, I believe cutting edge today is a result of incremental adjustments in style and not going off the reservation chasing new looks every time they present themselves. Being cutting edge is perfecting your craft, your look, and always knowing that your goal should be to produce heirloom images for your clients.

So study history. Study the true masters of photography. Study what sells for you and what doesn't. Study fashion magazines. Simply put, educate yourself.

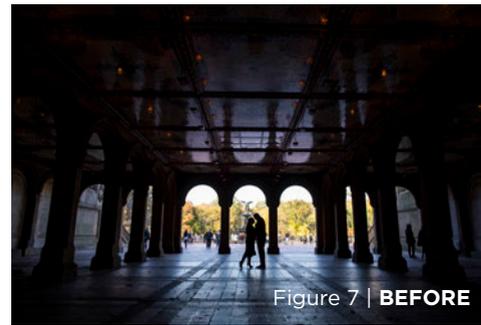


Figure 7 | BEFORE

Figure 7

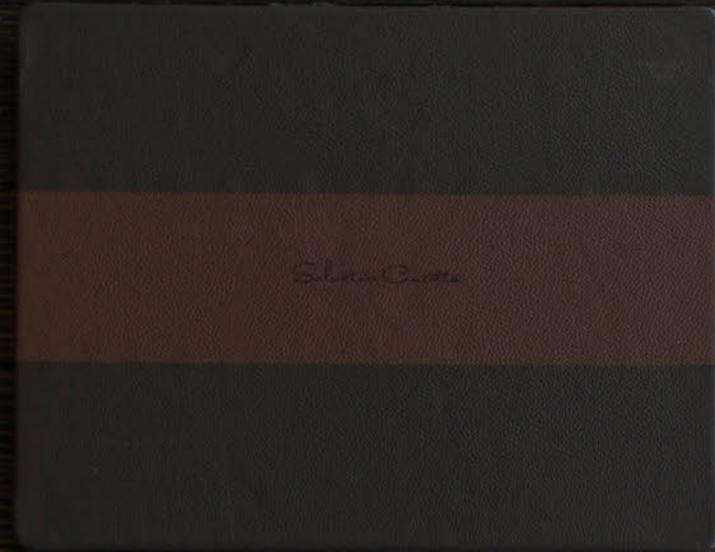
Black-and-white images will always hold their own as other trends fizzle out over time. The decision to make this image monochromatic was really to keep it as a timeless piece, taking into account the historic location in Central Park. The removal of the people takes away most of the distractions, isolating the silhouette of the couple. You can imagine the couple enjoying this image for the rest of their lives.

But what's next, and where do we go from here? Even though the majority of trails have been blazed, there will always be minor variations from year to year. In the future, the trends that will present themselves will be more specific to how you capture the image you want to capture. Trends will be defined by what is in the RAW file. The way you work with backlighting, off-camera flash, reflections and composition will help define the next trend.

This is not meant to instill fear, but to help guide you in defining your style in a lasting way. As you move forward in your career, it is important to recognize trends that will flame out and, more importantly, to maintain the look of your brand. ■

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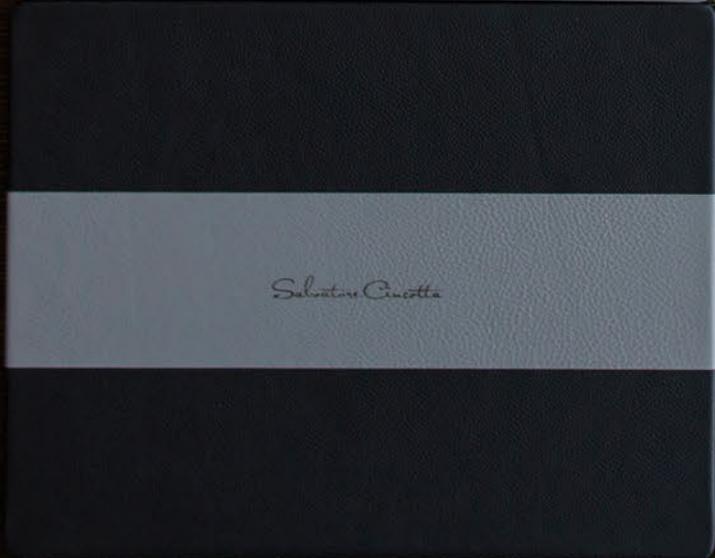




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MAKE MORE MONEY
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BY UPSELLING

WITH **ROB ADAMS**



by Rob Adams

With all the photographers and videographers entering the wedding sector, it's easy to get lost in a sea of companies in larger, more saturated areas. The ability to distinguish oneself from other video services is becoming more difficult, especially now that the overall skill and education level of new video producers is rising and wedding work is starting to look somewhat homogenized.

Wedding videos/films all look pretty similar to me (thought it's better now as opposed to four or five years ago). This can undermine my ability to command a higher price point for wedding films overall since in my market (NYC/NJ/PA), many newer or "volume model" videographers are undercutting the higher-end videographers, causing many brides to consider budget options without seeing the benefit of paying more for a highly polished, well-produced wedding film. I've had to find new ways to increase revenue. I've realized that the best way to do this without cutting my prices and doing more weddings was to leverage the spending tendencies of my existing clientele. The way I do this is by upselling the clients I've already earned.

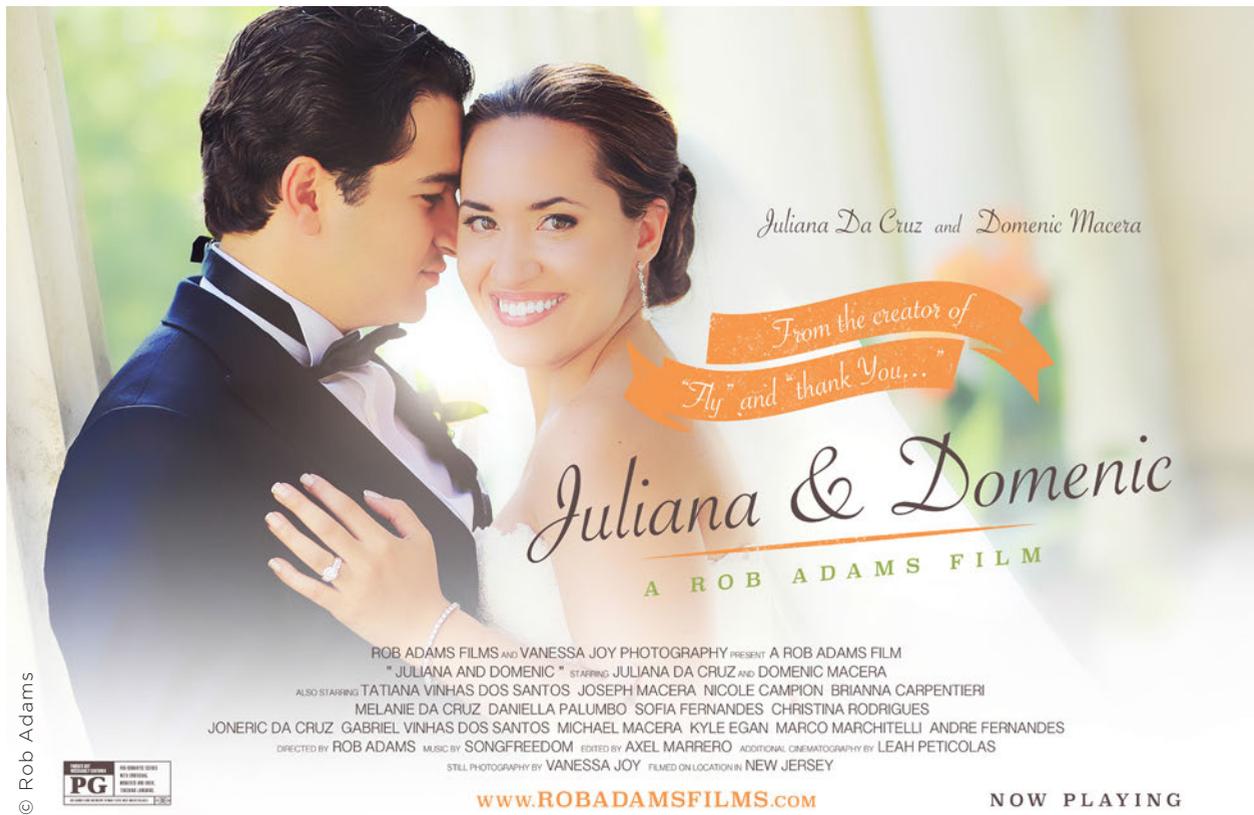
Upselling can occur either before or after the wedding. I start with a set package and pricing list. All my packages are designed with pull-throughs to get brides thinking they may be missing out on a better film or better quality by going with a lower-priced set of options.

For example, my second-most-expensive collection contains documentary edits of the whole ceremony, first dance, parents' dances and toasts. The collection beneath it does not. If you book the lower package, you get an eight- to 10-minute feature film, whereas with the next collection up, you get a longer feature film and the addition of those documentary edits.

What bride doesn't want her whole ceremony and the entirety of those important reception events? Not too many people in my market are willing to have just a creative film and not the longer edits that Mom and Grandma will certainly want for posterity. There are exceptions, but for the most part, this pull-through works very well in getting couples to spend \$2,000 more on a film package.

The same principle applies to upselling before the wedding. When clients book a package, I always make it perfectly clear that they can add any à la carte item to their order, or upgrade their package to a higher tier at any point before the wedding—even the day before. I'll even let them upgrade if they tell me the morning of their wedding. This is because we shoot every wedding using the same technique, allowing us to create any length of film at any point after the event. So I don't worry about not having the right material. The bride gets a sense of security knowing she always has that option.





I've had couples contact me days before their wedding to lock in a longer film or add a jib or aerial shots. I leverage this security by always asking brides at some point before the wedding (usually about four weeks before, when the nerves start to kick in) if they wish to upgrade or add on items.

Prewedding upgrading is not as effective as postwedding upselling. More on that in a moment. If postwedding upselling is meant to play off of the emotions experienced on the wedding day, prewedding upgrades are meant to play on the insecurity of wondering if they made the right package selection headed into the big day. What clients don't know out of the gate is that they will be propositioned to upgrade right after the wedding as well. Before the wedding, I'm more interested in getting them to upgrade their overall package. After the wedding, it's a whole different approach. Discounted prices and savings bundles are more effective after the wedding is over, after couples have experienced how fast it all went, confirming my prewedding warnings.

The Monday after we shoot a wedding, I sit down to answer my morning emails and immediately contact the weekend couples that may or may not be on their honeymoon by this point. I remember that my wife and I both checked our emails on our honeymoon, so I know

I'll be able to reach them soon enough. I tell them how wonderful the wedding was and what amazing footage we have from their day.

An important side note here: If I honestly feel like I don't have quality material or enough of it to warrant making a longer film—for fear of it hurting the overall quality—I won't offer certain upgrades. This can happen due to a really short ceremony, or having no toasts with which to weave a longer narrative story. I then inform them that it is not too late to make a better film. The upgrades option list I send them is a carefully structured menu of both à la carte items and upgrade packages that include everything from longer feature films in increments of individual minutes all the way up to 10 extra minutes; custom DVD or Blu-ray discs (we normally don't include optical media in our original packages); aerial footage (yes, I will revisit the venue if it's within a reasonable distance and if the price is right); theatrical trailers, movie poster designs and print credits for those movie posters; and even postwedding photo/video sessions to add extra creative footage to the feature film. Of course, documentary edits are also an upgrade option. The couple that didn't order them before the wedding will most certainly want to add them on because, looking back, they realize they won't be able to watch the whole wedding again. The options are practically limitless.



Here's the best part. In 2014, I was able to upsell a good portion of my clients, resulting in thousands of dollars in additional revenue for the year. My cost of sales for producing the wedding is not affected, and the only additional overhead is paying an editor the difference in editing the longer feature or assembling doc edits. DVDs and Blu-rays are all hourly work that I can outsource for cheap. The overall amount of extra work and cost absolutely justified the efforts to produce upgraded products.

I also created package bundles that include heavy discounts for adding more than one à la carte item and increments of additional minutes. For example, I have a feature-film upgrade package that offers Blu-ray discs and print credits plus 10 more minutes of additional feature. One package even includes the postwedding video shoot that makes it even easier to make a longer, more compelling film. Again, the options are limitless.

You just have to feel out what clients in your market are willing to spend their wedding-envelope money on, and play off of their emotions when the day has flown past. I'm not manipulating anyone. These brides are more than willing to hand over extra cash for an enhanced product, so I'd better be able to consistently deliver a quality product.

If you're struggling to produce good films one after another and find yourself missing key shots or recording poor audio, keeping you from consistently killing it, hold off on offering upgrades until you can do so. Otherwise, you might find yourself having a hard time meeting upgraded-client expectations. Expectation increases with each dollar more spent on postwedding upgrades. Overall, upselling your video clients is a great way to increase your bottom line and make them exponentially happier with your service. Brides often thank me for the time and care I spent upgrading them to a fuller experience. ■

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INSPIRATIONS

— best wedding image —

Put 10 photographers in a room and ask them to shoot a paperclip, and there's no telling what will happen. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I love being a photographer. We all see the world in our own special way. Ultimately, though, nothing is truly new or unique. Everything is inspired by something that came before. In that spirit, this month we asked you, our readers, to submit some work you thought would inspire your peers. What you gave us was inspiring for sure. Enjoy.

— **SAL CINCOTTA**
Editor-In-Chief



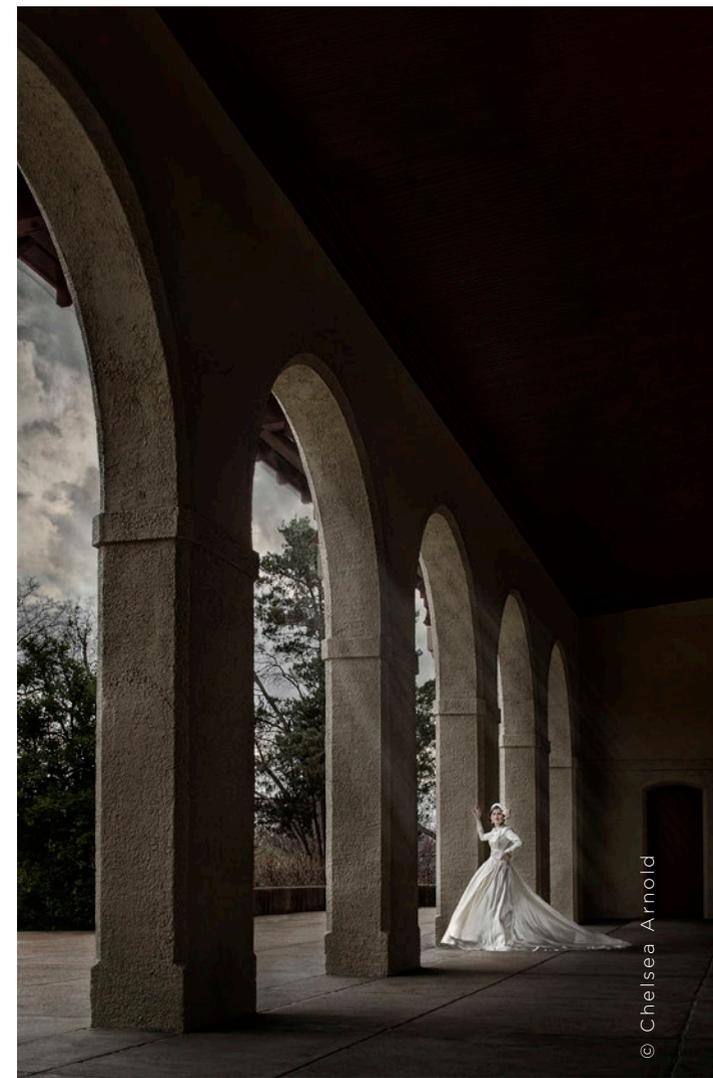
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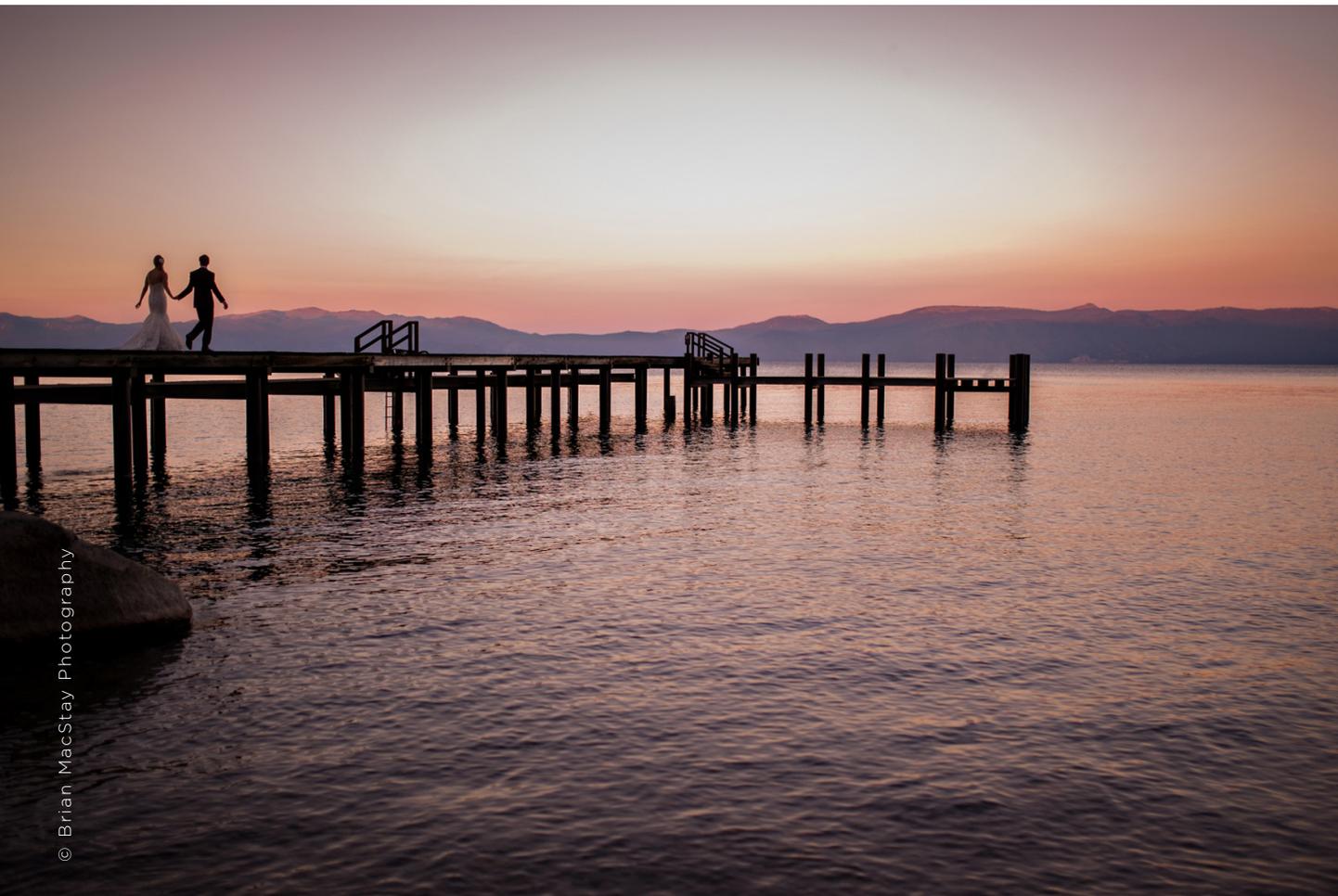


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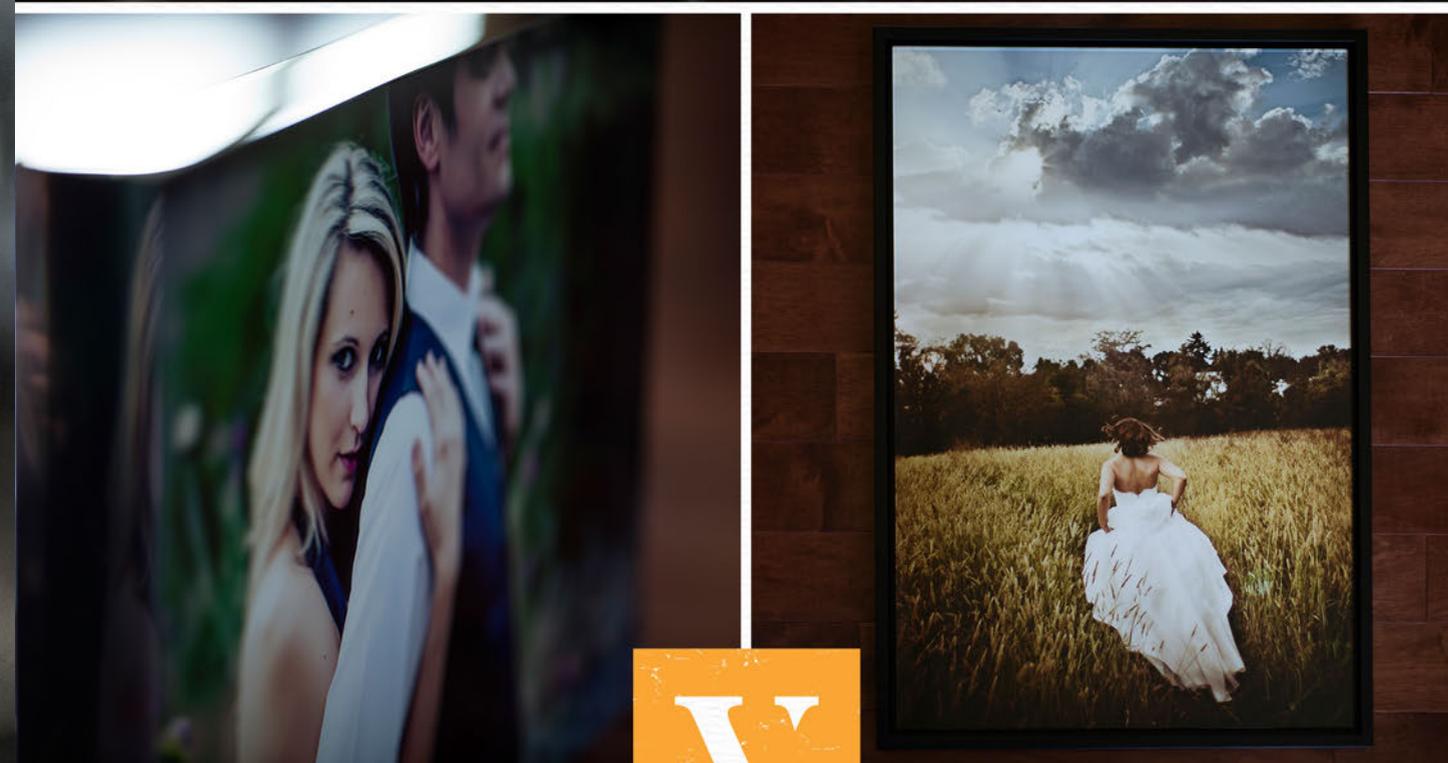






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Q&A

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QUESTIONS

- + How to increase your pricing and stay in business.
- + Best practices for approaching local vendors.
- + Insurance options for professional photographers.
- + How to gain more experience in wedding photography.
- + In-Person Sales workflow tips.
- + Where to find a second shooter.
- + Best practices for meetings with out-of-town clients.
- + Properly preparing for shoots in tricky locations.
- + How to convert online inquiries into in-person consultations.
- + Gift ideas to impress your clients.

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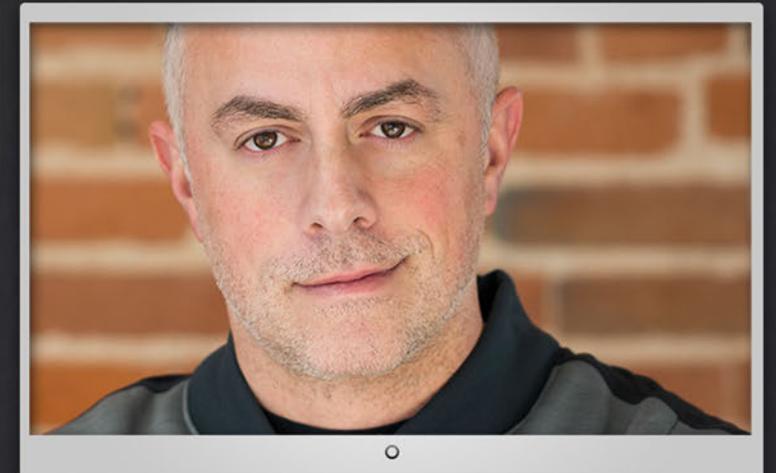


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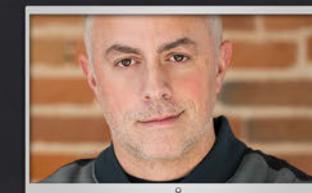
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IS YOUR BUSINESS
PROFITABLE?

WITH KRISTIN KORPOS



by **Kristin Korpos**

One of the toughest tasks for many creatives, including professional photographers, is to think like a business owner. That means a lot of things, one of which is coming to terms with the fact that every dollar a client gives you is not profit. Ensuring business profitability often means putting aside the creativity and scrutinizing both expenses and income. Is it a smart move to spend \$3,800 on a new 5d Mark IV (when it comes out) when you just purchased a 5d Mark III last year? Will that new camera really help your business make more money?

Restraint can be difficult. Many photographers could easily convince themselves that a new camera, with even just a few new features, could help create more revenue. The new camera could allow the photographer to take better images, and those better images could lead to more clients and sales. But the operative word is *could* because it is not a given. The artist is a dreamer. I know this because I am a dreamer who has always needed to remind myself to think like a business owner.

If you want to run a sustainable photography business, achieving long-term profitability should be a major priority. Why do you think many businesses fail in their first few years? Is more cash flowing out of the business rather than in? Did those business owners who failed know their numbers? Let's talk about what it means to be profitable.

WHAT DOES IT COST TO RUN YOUR BUSINESS?

A photography business is profitable when it earns enough money to cover all financial obligations as well as personal obligations, with money left over to intelligently reinvest in the business or save for the future. Do you know each and every one of your business costs? For every dollar that flows into your business, what amount must flow out again to pay for operating costs? You need to know this number, because it is an imperative piece of data for all business owners.

If you don't know this number—and don't feel alone, because many don't know it until income tax time hits each year—one of the simplest things to do is create a spreadsheet. Within the spreadsheet, list a description and amount for all monthly, quarterly and yearly expenses. These should include items like gallery hosting, software and studio management subscriptions, website hosting, editing services, equipment and studio rentals, continuing-education fees, film processing fees, advertising and marketing. This spreadsheet represents your operating costs—the amount of cash flow required to keep you in business.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT EXPENSES

Take a look at all your business expenses. Do you see any way to reduce them? Are you overspending in certain areas? Are you spending unnecessarily in some areas?

For example, do you pay for advertising? Many photographers pay a monthly fee for advertising in local newspapers or magazines, or on websites like WeddingWire or The Knot. Are you asking your clients how they found you? If not, you should be. If you are a wedding photographer and a very high percentage of couples have discovered you from your WeddingWire listing but not one has discovered you from a local newspaper, you may want to question the effectiveness of the newspaper ad. It might be wise to discontinue the newspaper campaign and get rid of that expense.

The takeaway here is that as a business owner, you need to question each and every expense to determine if it is positively impacting your business. By scrutinizing expenses and limiting extraneous dollars flowing out of your business, you ultimately help increase profitability. Many (and I speak for myself) are so eager to spend money because we are passionate about our craft that we often do not take the time to reflect. Do you really need that new prime lens so bad that it is worth it to charge it to your credit card at 18 percent interest? Make smart decisions. The health of your photography business—and your future—is at stake.

DO YOU NEED TO RAISE YOUR PRICES?

For some photographers, a deeper issue is that they may not be charging enough for their products and services. The cash coming into the business may not be enough to sustain the costs necessary to provide their products and services.

Create a spreadsheet that documents the cash received from clients over the past 12 months (if possible) and the anticipated cash to be received over the next 12 months due to retainers already in place. From this information, you can get some general data points, such as the approximate cash your business receives and will receive. How does this stack up against your expenses?

For example, do you outsource your image editing? Have you examined this expense to determine what additional amounts should be built into your pricing? Do you accept credit card payments? Credit card processors generally charge a 2 to 3 percent processing fee. Have you considered the need to build this additional expense into your packages?

Building and sustaining a profitable photography business is not easy work. There will be triumphs and there will be failures. Learn from your mistakes. If you have more debt than you want and no savings in the bank, or if you feel you are just financially treading in place each month, dig into your numbers.

SproutingPhotographer.com is just one of the many free calculators online you can use to create some basic business projections that can further help you determine if you need to be charging more. Use these calculators to gain a better understanding of what you should be charging in order to manage business and personal obligations, as well as save money for the future.

TOOLS

The most basic way to keep track of financial data is through the use of spreadsheet software like Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel. The most basic bookkeeping can be done with these apps. Other, more robust applications designed from the ground up specifically for small-business owners include Intuit's QuickBooks.

Yes, QuickBooks is another expense, but well worth the investment. The price varies depending on how many features you want and whether or not you want the online version. With the higher-priced online subscription levels, users can create numerous reports that can help them analyze their numbers. QuickBooks can teach you how to think like a business owner. When you see the real numbers, you learn from them.

This article just touches on some general aspects of determining business health and profitability. For more in-depth knowledge, and for information on creating and understanding financial statements and key ratios and percentages that come from those statements, check out *Small Business for Dummies* or a similar general business book.

Understanding more about the business side of your photography business is powerful. It's a huge investment in your future. It may be intimidating, but once you understand your numbers, think about how much more control you will have over your business. How liberating was it when you went from a priority mode to full manual operation of your camera? It changed your world, right? Well, this knowledge can change your world too. ■

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WITH

Salvatore Cincotta



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One of the questions I am constantly being asked is, “Sal, what lenses should I buy?” While there is no easy answer to this question, I can tell you that as a wedding and portrait photographer, a must-have lens is a wide-angle lens. My style of photography incorporates a lot of architecture. In order to accomplish this, I need something that can see wide. I suppose the other option is to run back really far to take the shot.

The Tamron SP 15-30MM F/2.8 Di VC USD is fast and wide. It’s the world’s only full-frame, ultra-wide-angle zoom with image stabilization. Not only that, this lens provides edge-to-edge sharpness, something we should all be conscious of in our imagery.

For the price point, this is a very high-quality piece of glass. Definitely worth taking a look at. If you don’t have a wide-angle lens in your bag today, now is the time to add this lens to your arsenal and add a new dimension to your photography.

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SILENCE THE NOISE



Best Practices for **Noise Reduction** in **Lightroom**

with Dustin Lucas



by **Dustin Lucas**

In post-production, image noise can be almost as distracting as a blurry image. When shooting in Aperture Priority mode, opening up your aperture all the way and seeing the shutter speed has dropped, it's ISO to the rescue. Throughout your daylong wedding shoot, you're going to encounter low light and be forced to throw your camera up into the high-ISO range. No need to worry about image quality—as long as you expose the image properly, you should be fine, right? Noise depends on many factors, but mostly how high you set your ISO, how much you increase exposure in post and whether or not you recover the shadows. After making these adjustments in Lightroom, move down to the Detail panel to silence the noise.

Using Lightroom for noise reduction can seem like a daunting task when editing hundreds of photos at a time. Even adjusting one photo can be difficult. I definitely want to address noise reduction for an entire set of images, but first we need to understand some fundamentals. There are two kinds of noise: color and luminance.

Classifying and Correcting the Noise

When looking in a large, single-colored area, you might notice a fragmented patch of discoloring. For example, in this night shot zooming in at 2:1, or 200%, the groom's suit has noticeable color noise (Figure 1 & 1a). Usually noise is more prevalent in the underexposed midtones and shadows where large gradients of a color have noise, especially in this night sky. Once you find an area you wish to correct, you can use the Detail panel to begin removal. You will notice that the Sharpening amount defaults to 25; adjust this to 0 for now. We will circle back to this adjustment after we complete noise reduction.

Under Noise Reduction, skip down to the Color, Detail and Smoothness sliders. Like sharpening, Adobe Camera Raw defaults color at 25. Start by moving the slider to the right and adding the correction effect (Figure 2 & 2a). At this point, I like to toggle the Detail panel on and off to see the change. I start by correcting color noise to fix the distracting discolored speckles and keep the clarity in the image. Moving below to the detail and smoothness sliders, these default at a value of 50 each. Adjusting the detail slider gives you the ability to control the threshold. This means that, as you move the slider to the right, the edge detail increases in color noise. Smoothness does quite the opposite: As you increase the value, a softened effect is applied to the speckled color tones.

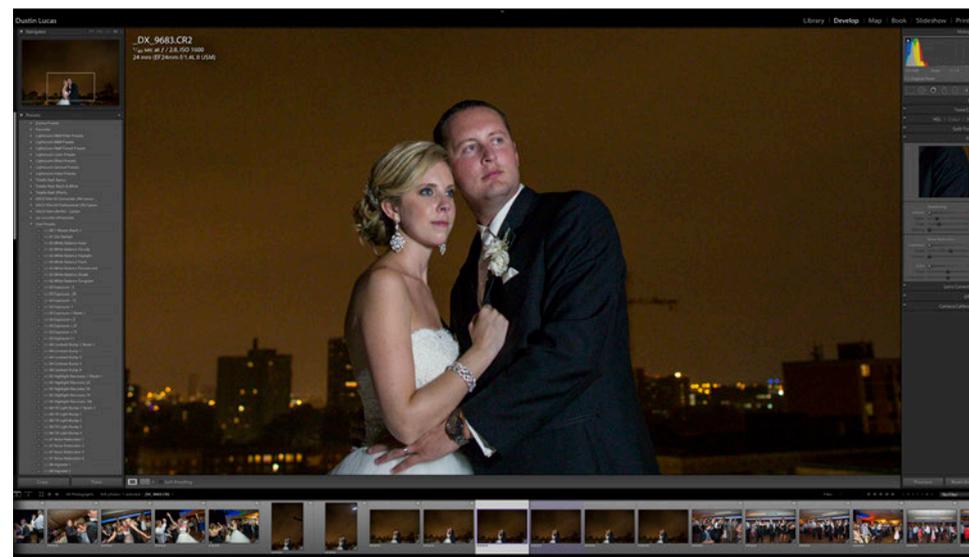


Figure 1

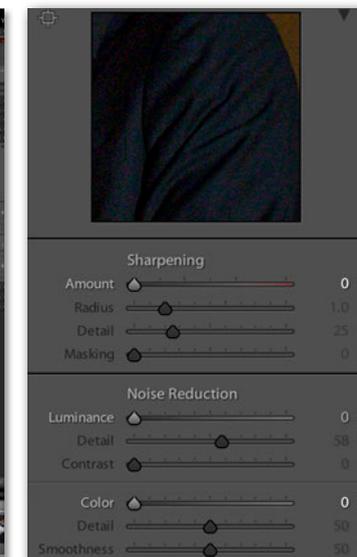


Figure 1a

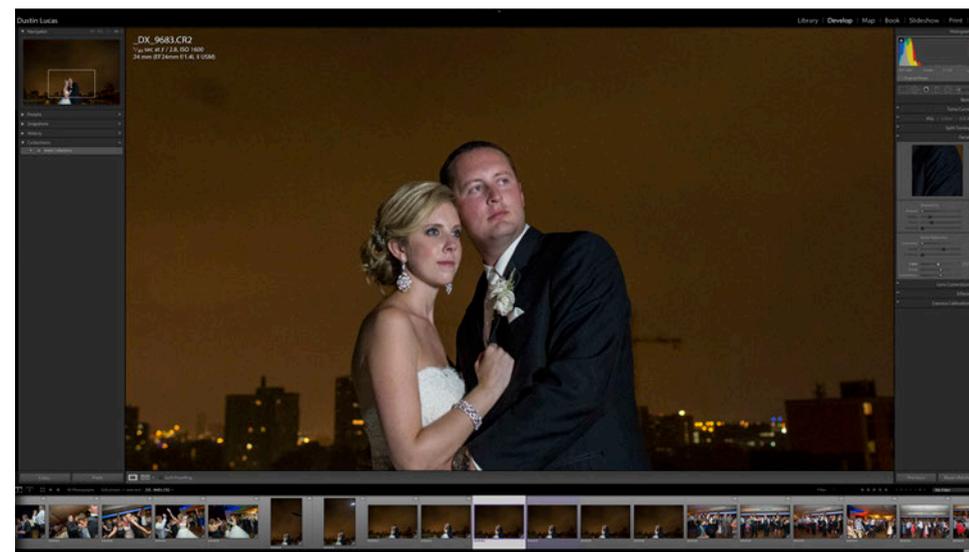


Figure 2

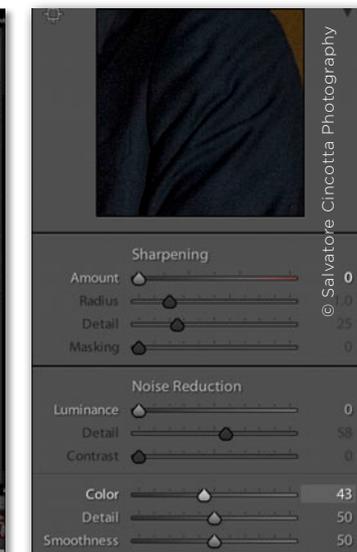


Figure 2a

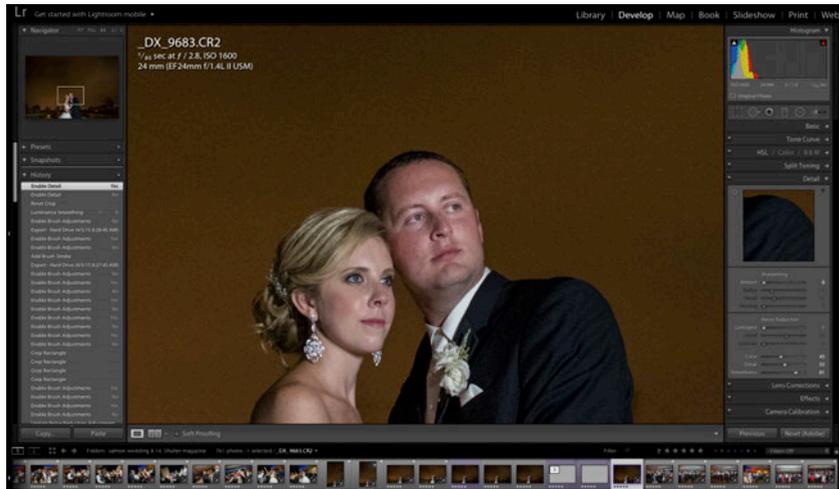


Figure 3



Figure 3a

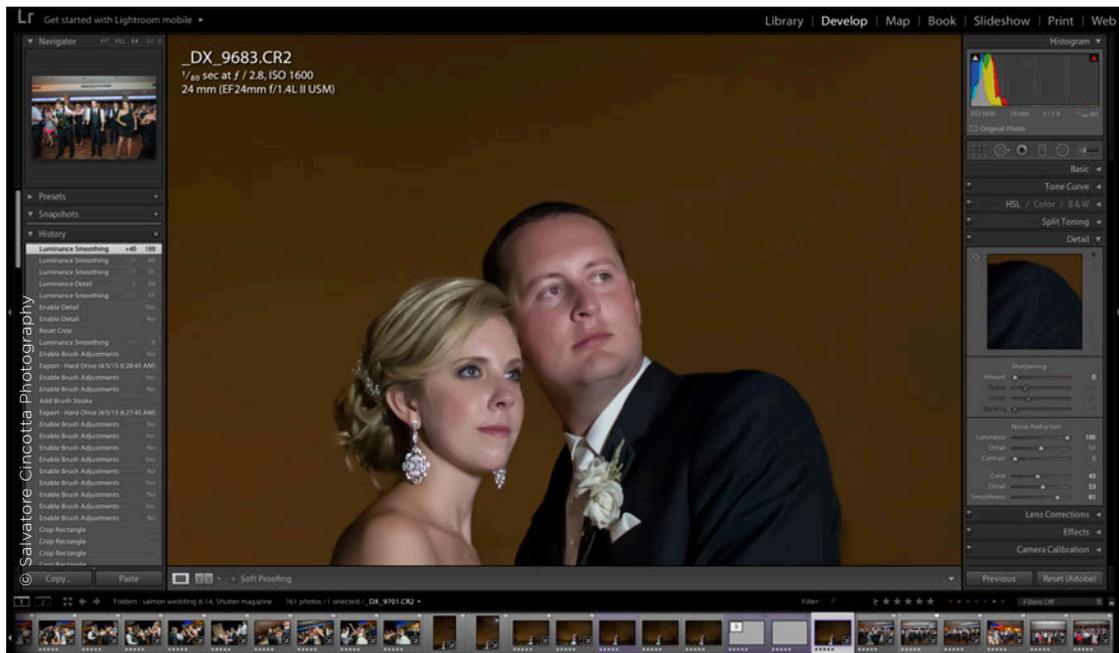


Figure 4

Now let's look at luminance noise (Figure 3 & 3a).

Luminance noise is visually the most obvious in underexposed and high-ISO images. There is evidence of this noise in the entire image. Using the same area we corrected for color noise, we have a range of highlights to deep shadow tones. This will work out great for reducing the noise for the entire image. Luminance noise is a major factor in the noise, or grain, of your images (Figure 4).



Figure 5

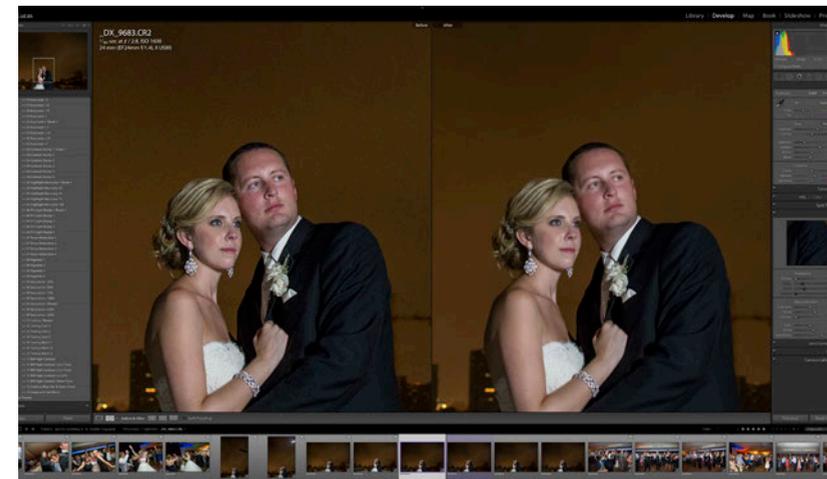


Figure 6

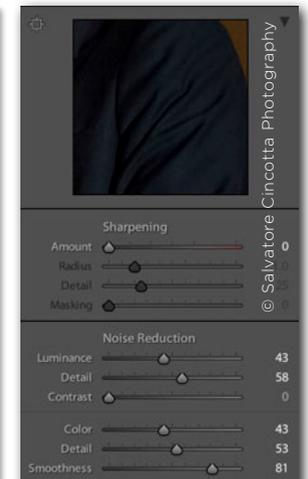


Figure 6a

Correcting luminance noise can quickly start to remove detail in your image, as you see I have done (Figure 5). Once you find a balance between soft and sharp, you can move the detail slider to the right. This gives you back some of the defined edges in the image, rather than sharpening the noise. You definitely do not want to sharpen the noise. Contrast is useful for blending areas where opposing tones meet. In short, this reacts similarly to editing the contrast: The less you use, the smoother tones seem side by side; adding more causes more distinct, or separated, tones. Generally, I stay around the default values and occasionally add detail under luminance noise (Figure 6 & 6a).



Figure 7a



Figure 7b & 7c

Now that you have made these noise reduction presets, you can filter your catalog by ISO in the Library module to select images and batch-apply the presets (Figure 9). You will repeat this step for every set of images needing the other noise reduction presets. If you want to be extremely particular, you can make a preset for every camera and ISO speed.

Plug-ins and External Editing in Lightroom

One step further than applying generalized presets based on ISO is using plug-ins to automate noise reduction. Plug-ins such as Topaz DeNoise, PictureCode Photo Ninja and Nik Dfine 2 require you to go to the menu bar and select Photo > Edit in > [software name], which forces Lightroom to export and save a duplicate (Figure 10). I have an example of the auto setting applied in Nik Dfine 2, which seems to be the best balance between easiest interface and best quality (Figure 11). They all include automation features that can batch-process your images, which is great when you want to rasterize your RAW file (Figure 12). Not to mention that this becomes time-consuming once you process an entire wedding.

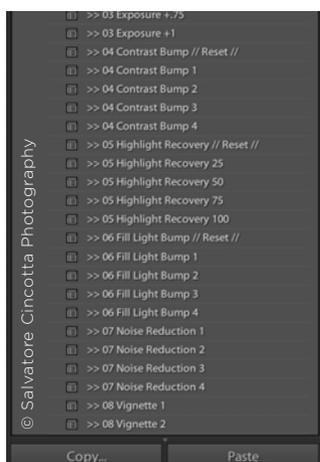


Figure 8



Figure 9

Lightroom incorporates noise reduction with some of the adjustment brushes as well. These tools are the Graduated Filter, Radial Filter and Adjustment brush. Lightroom has added the ability to specifically edit areas of the photo in order to add more noise reduction (move the slider to the right) or remove the effect (move the slider to the left) that was created under the Detail panel earlier (Figures 7a, 7b, & 7c). A huge benefit of selectively editing an image is bringing back some detail in an area that needed less attention.

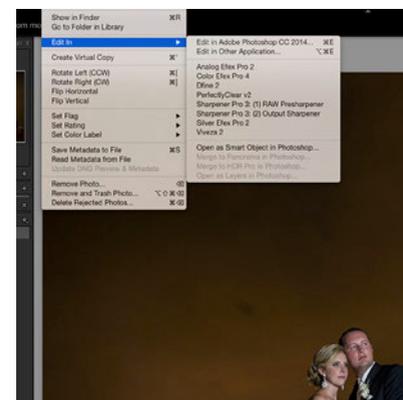


Figure 10



Figure 11

Creating a Noise Reduction Workflow

We just walked through correcting noise for a single image, but what about the rest of the images? Syncing settings is a huge efficiency tool across similarly lit and exposed images. This is a great starting point. With the image we corrected already, it can be a middle ground for settings across the entire set of images. If you are interested in making the different presets for noise reduction, this is a great tool to begin bridging the individualized and batched editing processes. I would start by correcting individual low-, middle- and high-ISO images to gauge differences between each of them. For each image, make a new Develop Preset and name each accordingly. (I explain presets in-depth in my previous article “Efficiency With Lightroom Presets” (Figure 8).)



Figure 12

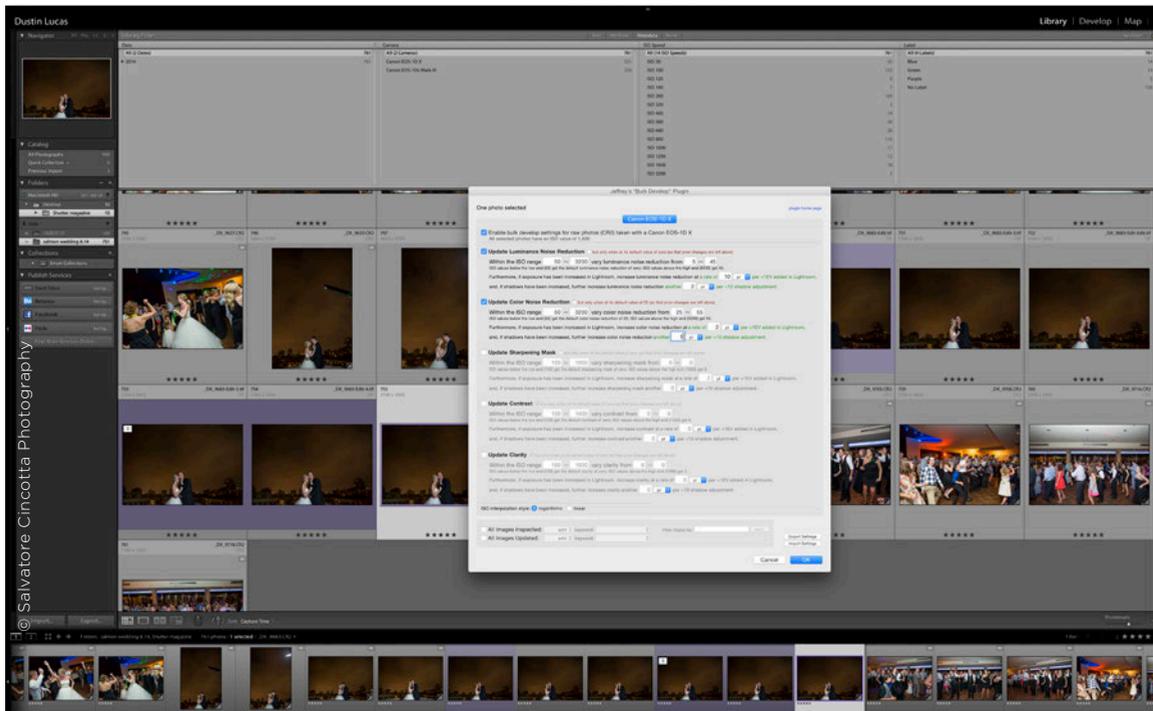


Figure 13

Batch Editing

There is a solution to batch editing all your images and not having to render duplicate image files. A donation-based plug-in by Jeffrey Friedl called Bulk Develop Settings allows you to edit images in Lightroom. Here is how it works. Noise reduction is broken down into Luminance and Color categories. As exposure increases, this can be compensated for by adding points of Luminance and Color. The same goes for shadow recovery, although the set value is every 10 points of recovery for a custom increase of noise reduction. This plug-in also includes Sharpening Mask, Contrast and Clarity. This game-changing batch editor is useful once you process an entire wedding for white balance and exposure, giving your work a hand-touched look with a fraction of the time spent. Once you edit the cleanest image with least noise and the harshest one with a lot of noise reduction, you can build your parameters in the plug-in to be applied to all images. This means that you choose the lowest-ISO image with the least-corrected exposure and the highest-ISO image with the exposure increased the most (Figure 13).

After you have completed noise reduction, you need to apply sharpening. (See my article “Attention to Detail: Better Results With Sharpening” from the November 2014 issue for more information.) Remember not to be hypercritical of noise. Noise is a traditional photographic element that has been revered by digital photographers. Leaving some noise in a photograph can give it some realism, if you are into that sort of thing. Try out some of these techniques and try to save images you thought were hopeless. ■

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Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 24-70mm f/2.8L
Settings | 1/80 sec @ f16, ISO 100



by **Craig LaMere**

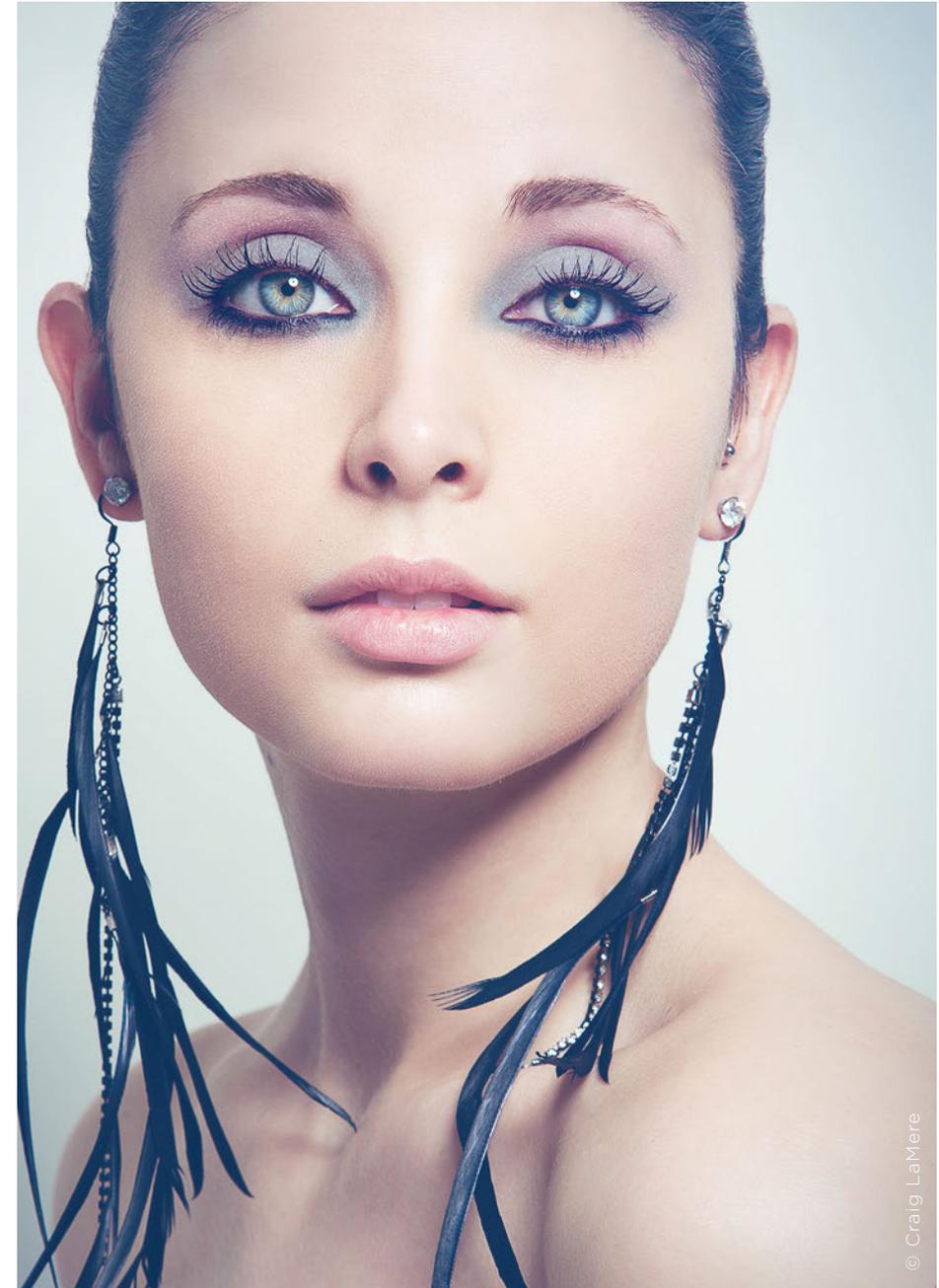
I'm often asked what my go-to lens is. My standard answer might seem like the worst smartass answer ever, but it is the only one I have: My favorite lens is the one that enables me to shoot the image I have in my head. That said, it's hard choosing the right one. So let's talk zoom versus prime lenses.

Zoom Lenses

A zoom lens uses specialized mechanics that allow you to change focal lengths by turning the zoom ring. There are as many types and quality of zoom lenses as there are focal lengths. Lenses that are on the lower to midrange end in quality tend to have the greatest zoom margins. Typical zoom lengths at the midrange level include 28mm–300mm and 70mm–300mm. Higher-end lenses typically don't have the wide range, and are commonly 16mm–35mm, 24mm–70mm and 70mm–200mm.



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 24-70mm f/2.8L
Settings | 1/125 sec @ f8, ISO 100



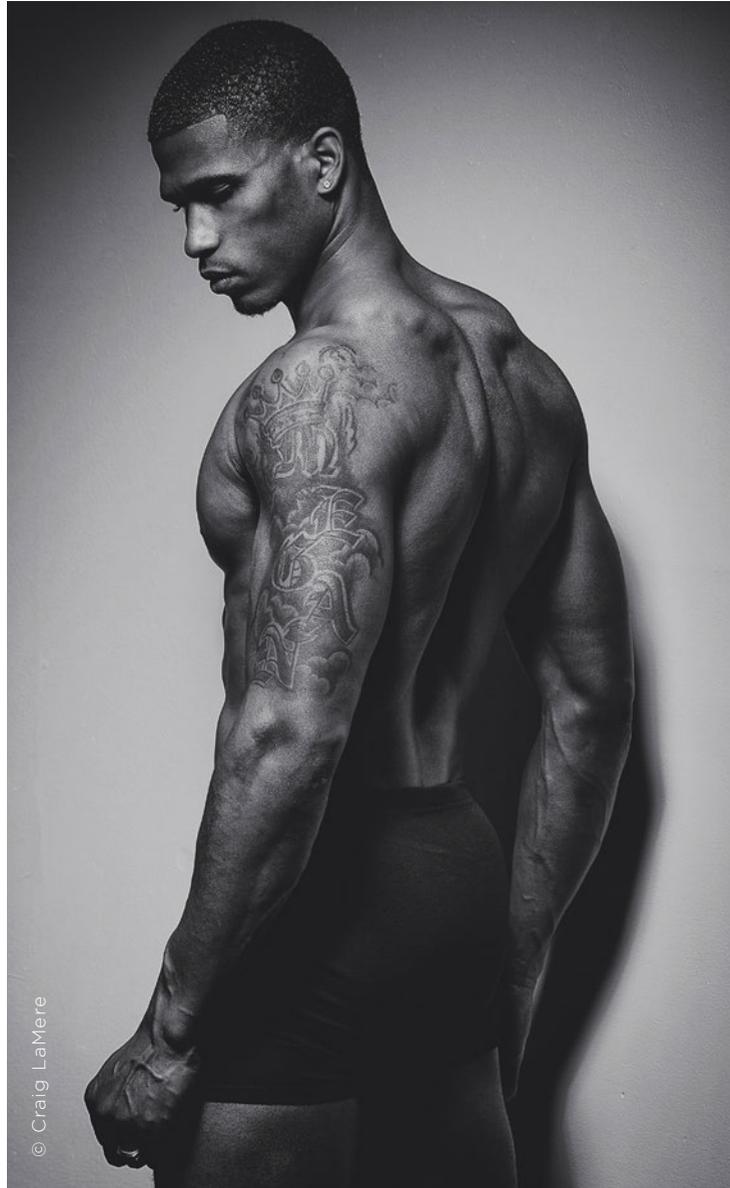
Camera | Canon EOS-1D Mark III
Lens | 70-200mm f/2.8L
Settings | 1/100 sec @ f14, ISO 100

Prime Lenses

Prime lenses have a set focal length and do not zoom in or out mechanically. If you are standing in one place and want more or less of an image in the frame, you have to physically move to get what you want in the picture. An 85mm lens has a fixed focal length of 85mm—no more, no less.

Aperture

Aperture is literally the size of the hole in the lens that allows so much light through it. When talking about aperture, you have to talk about f-stop and depth of field, as they are connected at the hip. The f-stop is the size of the aperture. This is where aperture gets a little confusing for people because the relationship is opposite to the terminology. Remember that the smaller the f-stop number, the larger the aperture. If you are at f1.2, the aperture—or the hole—is much greater than if you were at f16. How all this relates to depth of field is that the aperture determines how much is in focus and how much is not in your image. If you were shooting f1.2, you would have a much smaller depth of field than if you were shooting f16. Depending on the type of shooter you are and the environments you shoot in, this part is critical in choosing the right lens.



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 100mm f/2.8L Macro IS
Settings | 1/160 sec @ f9, ISO 100

Fixed Aperture vs. Variable Aperture

One of the biggest differences between prime and zoom lenses (more so in the lower to midrange zoom market) is how the aperture works in them. Lower to midrange lenses usually have a varying aperture. Variable aperture means that as you change the focal length of the zoom lens, the aperture changes as well. Let's say you have a lens that is 70mm–300mm and f3.5–f5.6. What those numbers are telling you is that at 70mm, your maximum aperture is f3.5, and when you are zoomed out to 300mm, your max is f5.6. These numbers are super-important because they correspond to your depth of field and also to the limitations the lens will have in certain lighting conditions. In the higher-end zoom lenses, you see a lot more of what is called fixed aperture. Fixed aperture is when the lens keeps a constant aperture throughout the entire focal length. For instance, my Canon 24–70 L 2.8 can stay at f2.8 from 24mm to 70mm, which gives me latitude in how I can use the lens. Primes, on the other hand, have fixed apertures because they have a single focal length.

If you are a wedding shooter and you want a zoom so you can easily move in and out of your subjects, the variable versus fixed aperture issue is huge for you. Many wedding locations do not allow any artificial light, and so you are forced to shoot with the available ambient light, and the best aperture you can get to is f3.5; when zoomed to f5.6, even with your ISO pumped up, that may not work at all. A fixed-aperture zoom would better fit your needs. Buying a 70–200mm 2.8 would be a better choice, even though it's more of an investment than buying the variable zoom.

One of the features that makes primes different from zooms is their max aperture. A lot of prime lenses are somewhere between f1.2 and f2, and most high-end zooms are f2.8 and higher. If you are a wedding shooter whose main concern is having the largest aperture available so lighting issues are minimized, you would probably choose an 85mm f1.2,



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 24-70mm f/2.8L
Settings | 1/125 sec @ f10, ISO 100



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 85mm f/1.2L II
Settings | 1/640 sec @ f1.2, ISO 160



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 100mm f/2.8L Macro IS
Settings | 1/125 sec @ f13, ISO 100

Cost

So which is the better deal? If you are going lens for lens, it would look like buying a prime is the better deal since they typically cost less than a zoom, especially when you get into the higher-end fixed-aperture zooms. But here is one thing you have to take into consideration. When you buy a zoom lens, you are buying focal length X to focal length X, which is basically like having a number of lenses built into one. When you are buying a prime, you are buying only one focal length. To get as many focal lengths as you get in your zoom, you have to buy multiple individual primes, which could cost more than buying one higher-end zoom.



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 85mm f/1.2L II
Settings | 1/100 sec @ f10, ISO 100

Depth of Field

Depth of field is such a huge part of images and the creative process. I'm not going to get into the nuts and bolts of how it all works, but what I will say is the bigger your lens aperture or smaller the f-stop, the shallower your depth of field will be. It is the shallow DOF that makes more of your background dreamy and creamy, and separates your subject. One other factor to take into consideration is the actual focal length of the lens used. Even though two lenses can be at the same f-stop, they are going to produce very different images based on the focal length in relationship to the subject. As an example, if two people shoot the same person at f.28 and one person is using a 200mm lens and one is using a 24mm lens, the images in regards to depth of field are going to look much different. With the 200mm, you have compressed the image so less of the background can be seen in the frame, and so the DOF seems to be greater in the image. With the 24mm, you have included much more of the background, and so you have not isolated the subject, and your images will not have that creamy, dreamy look. This should be a huge consideration when choosing a lens.



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 200mm f/2L
Settings | 1/1250 sec @ f2, ISO 400

Zoom vs. Prime Trade-offs

Here are a few key points to keep in mind when choosing a lens.

Convenience - Zooms are going to be way more efficient and convenient if you need multiple focal lengths fast, since it's like having a number of individual lenses built into one.

Performance - Primes outperform zooms as far as sharpness and aberrations go because of the simple fact that they have been built to do one thing at one focal length.

Subtraction and multiplication - If you want to add or take away from a shot, all you have to do is turn a zoom lens one way or another. If you want to add or take away from a shot with a prime, you get to use your "foot zoom" and step closer or farther away from the subject.

Aperture - Primes have a much greater aperture than a zoom. Most zoom lenses are maxed at f2.8, and primes usually go from 1.2 to 2.0.

Size - Primes are smaller in size and easier to carry than a zoom. ■

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Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 200mm f/2L
Settings | 1/1600 sec @ f2.8, ISO 500



Camera | Canon EOS 5D Mark III
Lens | 135mm f/2L
Settings | 1/640 sec @ f3.2, ISO 640

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